



ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND BEHAVIORAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY
GRADUATE PROGRAM

**CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF DIVORCE ON MUSLIM
WOMEN IN ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

BY:

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OCTOBER, 2024

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

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STUDENT APPROVAL SHEET

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I, **Sitina Amino**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “*Causes and Consequences of Divorce on Muslim Women in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*” submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Arts (MA) in Developmental Psychology, is my original work and it has never been presented in any university. All sources and materials used for this thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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Acronyms/ Abbreviations

CI	Confidence Interval
ETB	Ethiopian Birr
OR	Odds Ratio
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences Software

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Abstract

Divorce is an increasingly common social phenomenon with significant psychological, social, and economic consequences, particularly for women in patriarchal societies. This study investigates the causes and consequences of divorce among Muslim women in Addis Ababa using a mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were gathered from 313 divorced women through structured questionnaires, while qualitative insights were obtained from in-depth interviews with six experienced lawyers. The findings reveal that key causes of divorce include communication breakdown, behavioral incompatibility, polygamy, economic hardship, emotional neglect, and substance abuse—particularly khat addiction. These factors are often compounded by socio-cultural expectations, inadequate pre-marital inquiry, and family interference. The consequences of divorce on women were found to be multidimensional, encompassing emotional distress, social stigma, economic instability, and diminished self-esteem. Recommendations include enhancing pre-marital counseling, increasing awareness of women's rights under Islamic and civil law, and strengthening post-divorce psychological and financial support systems. This research contributes to a nuanced understanding of divorce within Muslim communities and offers culturally informed strategies for intervention and support.

Keywords: *marriage, divorce, economic independence, cultural diversity, social values*

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

Any reflection on divorce stem from the concept of marriage. Marriage is commonly defined as a partnership between two members of opposite sex known as husband and wife (Eyo, 2018). Stable marriage has a positive effect on the economic, emotional and psychological well-being of men and women and dramatically benefits the well-being and successful development of children, which is critical to the success and preservation of nations (Marcia, 2008). For most people, marriage is a fundamental aspect of a relationship, intended to last a lifetime (Meaza M, 2014). However, not all marriages endure, and many end in divorce.

Divorce becomes a necessary relief and a viable solution when the marriage no longer provides any benefit, when the wife is harmed by staying with her husband, or when one partner exhibits immoral behavior, defiance, disobedience, or irreligiousness, in contrast to the other (Dogarawa, 2009). Legally, divorce is defined as the final dissolution of a marital union (Anderson, 2013). Over the past few decades, divorce rates have increased dramatically around the world, reflecting major social and cultural changes (Treas, Scott, & Richards, 2014). Divorce is no longer viewed as an unusual or rare outcome but as a growing global phenomenon (Tembe, 2010). As most people eventually marry, divorce remains a potential experience for many (Wolfinger, 2005).

Divorce rates have risen significantly not only in developed nations but also in developing countries (Sharma, 2011). In Ethiopia, divorce is becoming an increasingly common and deeply rooted issue in both urban and rural areas (Mohammed & Yehualashet, 2016). Unless interventions are made the rate of divorce will continue to rise resulting in the psychosocial and economic crises. (Mekonnen et al, 2019)

While some marriages break down due to overt conflict, many seemingly stable unions also end in divorce (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). There is no single explanation for divorce; rather, it results from a combination of individual, relational, cultural, economic, and legal factors (Stewart & Brentano, 2006). Common causes include communication breakdowns, family interference, lack of commitment, financial struggles, addiction, domestic violence, and incompatibility—both emotional and sexual (Askalemariam & Minwagaw, 2013). Additional factors such as infertility, religious or ethnic differences, early marriage, and age disparities have

also been identified as contributing to divorce in Ethiopian society (Serkalem, 2006; Mohammed & Yehualashet, 2016).

The consequences of divorce are equally multifaceted. It affects not only the emotional and mental health of individuals but also their social status, financial security, parenting responsibilities, and legal standing. For women—especially in conservative or patriarchal societies like Ethiopia—these consequences can be particularly severe. Studies have shown that divorced women are more likely to experience poverty, social stigma, limited access to legal protection, and psychological challenges such as loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Bogale, 2008; Adegoke, 2010; Aktar, 2013). Divorce can also negatively impact children’s well-being, disrupting their emotional development, education, and family support systems (Smith et al., 1991).

From an Islamic perspective, divorce is permissible but highly discouraged. It is considered the most detested of all lawful actions in Islam. Islamic teachings emphasize reconciliation and patience, allowing divorce only when efforts to resolve marital conflict have failed and living together becomes impossible (Abdulrahman, 2020). Despite these religious teachings, the number of divorces among Muslim couples continues to grow, raising concerns about both the causes and the consequences of this trend.

Given the increasing rates of divorce and its significant impacts, this study aims to examine the causes and consequences of divorce among Muslim women. It explores the issue from multiple perspectives—social, economic, and emotional—with the goal of contributing to a better understanding of this important issue and offering recommendations for community support and policy interventions.

1.2.Statement of the Problem

It's no wonder that divorce and family insecurity have attracted wide attention among social scientists (Treas, Scott, and Richards, 2014).

Divorce is a growing social phenomenon with profound implications for individuals, families, and society at large. In many urban contexts, including Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, the rate of marital dissolution has been on the rise, reflecting shifting social norms, economic pressures, and evolving gender roles (Central Statistical Agency [CSA], 2016; Tadele & Ali,

2019). Among Muslim women, divorce carries unique social, religious, and cultural implications that distinguish their experiences from those of other groups. Despite the increasing visibility of divorced women in urban Muslim communities, there remains a notable gap in academic research exploring the specific causes and consequences of divorce from their perspectives.

In Islamic teachings, divorce is permissible but discouraged unless necessary, and women may initiate divorce through mechanisms such as *khul'* or *faskh* (Esposito, 2001). However, religious practices are often influenced by local interpretations, patriarchal norms, and legal structures, which may limit women's agency in both entering and exiting marriage (Hassan, 2003; Moghadam, 2004). In the Ethiopian context, particularly in Addis Ababa, these dynamics intersect with modern legal systems, urbanization, and socioeconomic challenges, creating a complex environment for Muslim women navigating divorce.

Preliminary studies in Ethiopia have shown that divorced women often face social stigma, economic marginalization, and psychological stress (Tadele, 2015; Bekele & Arega, 2020). However, such studies rarely disaggregate data by religious affiliation or explore how Islamic values, community expectations, and gender roles shape the divorce experience for Muslim women specifically. The lack of nuanced, empirical research in this area makes it difficult for policymakers, religious leaders, and social support systems to adequately address the needs of this population.

Understanding the specific causes of divorce—such as financial stress, domestic violence, lack of compatibility, or unmet religious expectations—and the consequences that follow, including economic hardship, emotional trauma, or social exclusion, is crucial to formulating culturally sensitive interventions (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2002). Without this understanding, Muslim women in Addis Ababa may continue to face systemic disadvantages and social invisibility in both academic discourse and social policy.

This study is substantially initiated by the observation of the experimenter as part of the Muslim community in Addis Ababa. Having a chance to involve in different Islamic institutions, the experimenter has observed the adding rate of divorce along with suspected causes for divorce polygamy and unplanned and unthought- of marriage with lower rational enquiries made before marriage. Also, Mohammed and Yehualashet, (2016) revealed that there's a clear definition of the high prevalence of divorce rate among Muslims in Gondar megacity.

The study investigates the underlying causes and multidimensional consequences of divorce on Muslim women in Addis Ababa. By situating the inquiry within both Islamic and local Ethiopian socio-cultural contexts, the study aims to fill a critical research gap and contribute to more inclusive social policy and support mechanisms.

The study, thus, seeks to answer the following questions

1. What are the factors that lead to divorce among Muslims women in Addis Ababa?
2. What are the major consequences of divorce that Muslim women encounter?

1.3.Objectives of the study

1.3.1. General objectives

The general objective of this study was to assess the causes and consequences of divorce on Muslim women in Addis Ababa.

1.3.2. Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To identify factors that lead to divorce among Muslims women in Addis Ababa.
2. To investigate the consequences of divorce on Muslim women in Addis Ababa.

1.4.Significance of the study

By identifying the possible causes and consequences of divorce this study adds new data and information to the literature and serve as a springboard for further studies on the Muslim community in Ethiopia. Also, by giving sapience to the problems and encouraging results the study motivates religious leaders and the government to work towards sustaining marriages.

1.5.Scope of the study

This study was delimited to divorced Muslim women living in Addis Ababa. The area was chosen for the availability of Muslim divorcees and rising rate observed by the researcher.

1.6.Limitation

The study has limitations regarding the population addressed. It focused exclusively on Muslim women in Addis Ababa. Additionally, the samples were selected using a non-probability sampling technique (purposive sampling), and the quantitative data were collected via Google Forms. Thus, the generalizability of the results is affected by these reasons. Beside these limitations, the findings of the study are consistent with contemporary research, which highlights a range of factors—both individual and societal—that contribute to marital dissolution and its consequences on women. The complexity of divorce is evident, as multiple factors often interact to create an environment where marriage becomes unsustainable.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

2.1.Introduction

Divorce is a multifaceted social and psychological issue affecting individuals and communities across the globe. In recent decades, it has emerged as a pressing concern, particularly for women who often bear the brunt of its economic, emotional, and social consequences. While divorce is a global phenomenon, its causes and consequences are deeply rooted in cultural, religious, and socio-political contexts.

2.2 Theoretical Review

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory, developed by Bowlby (1969), emphasizes the importance of early emotional bonds in shaping future relationships. In the context of marriage and divorce, attachment styles influence how individuals respond to relationship challenges, separations, and emotional loss. Anxious or avoidant attachment styles may exacerbate emotional distress during and after divorce. For Muslim women, cultural expectations and family structures may either buffer or intensify these attachment-related responses.

Trauma Theory

Trauma theory explores the psychological impact of distressing experiences, including emotional, physical, or psychological abuse that may occur before, during, or after divorce. Herman (1992) emphasizes the long-term consequences of trauma, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Muslim women who undergo divorce may face heightened trauma due to community ostracism, loss of children, or violence. Understanding trauma responses is essential in assessing the mental health needs of divorced women.

Coping Theory

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping theory describes how individuals manage stress through cognitive and behavioral strategies. Coping mechanisms such as problem-solving, emotional regulation, and spiritual practices are central to psychological recovery post-divorce. For Muslim women, religious faith and communal support may serve as culturally grounded coping

resources, while stigma and lack of agency may hinder adaptive coping. This theory helps examine individual resilience and adaptation in the face of divorce-related stress.

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality, introduced by Crenshaw (1989), is useful in psychological research for understanding how multiple identities—such as religion, gender, class, and ethnicity—shape mental health outcomes. For Muslim women, the experience of divorce is often compounded by intersecting layers of discrimination and expectation, which can intensify feelings of isolation, fear, and emotional distress. Intersectionality theory allows for a nuanced understanding of how diverse identities influence psychological well-being post-divorce.

2.2.Marriage in Islam

Marriage in Islam, known as *nikah*, is regarded as a sacred contract between two consenting individuals, with profound religious, social, and legal implications. It is considered a cornerstone of Islamic life, serving both spiritual and practical purposes. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of marriage as a means to foster companionship, tranquility, and mutual support between partners, stating, “And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them, and He placed between you affection and mercy” (Qur'an, 30:21). This verse highlights the core Islamic values of love, compassion, and cooperation that are central to a successful marriage. Marriage is not merely a social obligation but a moral safeguard, helping individuals fulfill their natural desires in a lawful and dignified manner.

In Islam, marriage is regarded as a contract rather than a sacrament, making it a legally binding agreement that sets forth the rights and responsibilities of both partners. The *nikah* contract involves mutual consent, where both the bride and groom must agree to the union without coercion. One of the key components of this contract is the *mahr* or dowry, a gift given by the groom to the bride as a symbol of commitment and security. The *mahr* is not a purchase but a gesture of goodwill, ensuring the financial independence of the bride, which she can use freely. In the eyes of Islamic jurisprudence, marriage is a partnership based on equity, where the husband is responsible for providing financial support (*nafqa*), while the wife is entitled to maintain her wealth and resources (Wani, 2018).

Another significant aspect of marriage in Islam is the emphasis on gender roles and responsibilities within the family. While Islamic teachings encourage cooperation and mutual respect, they also delineate specific roles for husbands and wives. The husband is typically seen as the provider and protector of the family, while the wife is often considered the primary caregiver and nurturer. However, these roles are not rigid, and modern interpretations of Islamic law advocate for greater flexibility, allowing for shared responsibilities in household and financial matters. Many Muslim scholars emphasize that Islamic marriage is built on the principles of consultation (*shura*) and mutual respect, encouraging couples to make joint decisions for the well-being of their family (Ahmad & Rehman, 2020).

Despite its sanctity, Islam acknowledges that marriage may not always be successful, and provisions for divorce are allowed when reconciliation is not possible. However, divorce is viewed as a last resort, with the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) describing it as “the most hated permissible act” (Hadith, Sunan Abu Dawood). Islamic law prescribes processes for conflict resolution before resorting to divorce, such as arbitration and counseling. Nevertheless, if divorce becomes inevitable, the rights of both partners are protected, with special attention to the well-being of women and children. These regulations highlight Islam's balanced approach to marriage, aiming to preserve family unity while recognizing individual autonomy and dignity (Alkhateeb, 2021).

2.2.1 Dissolution of Marriage in Islam

Dissolution of marriage in Islam is a complex process that is governed by clear religious and legal principles. While marriage is considered sacred, Islam acknowledges that not all marriages are successful, and divorce is allowed as a last resort. The Qur'an and Hadith provide specific guidelines for the dissolution of marriage, focusing on fairness and justice for both partners. Divorce in Islam is permitted but discouraged, as it is seen as “the most hated permissible act” in the sight of Allah (Hadith, Sunan Abu Dawood). The goal of these provisions is to protect the rights and dignity of both parties while ensuring that divorce is not undertaken hastily or without due consideration. Before reaching the point of divorce, Islamic teachings encourage efforts toward reconciliation, including mediation by family members or arbitrators, as mentioned in the Qur'an (4:35).

There are various forms of divorce in Islam, the most well-known being *talaq*, which is the divorce initiated by the husband. Under Islamic law, a man can divorce his wife by pronouncing the word “*talaq*” three times, though many scholars argue that this should be done over a period of time to allow for reconciliation. There is also the concept of a waiting period (*iddah*) after the pronouncement of *talaq*, usually lasting three months, during which the couple is encouraged to reflect on their decision and possibly reconcile. During this period, the wife remains in the husband’s home, and the marriage is still valid. If reconciliation occurs, the divorce is voided. If the waiting period expires without reconciliation, the divorce is finalized, and both parties are free to remarry (Hassan & Rahman, 2019).

On the other hand, Islam also grants women the right to seek divorce under certain circumstances, known as *khula*. In *khula*, the wife initiates the dissolution of the marriage by returning the *mahr* or dowry given to her by the husband. This right ensures that women are not trapped in abusive or unhappy marriages. However, *khula* often requires judicial approval or arbitration in some cultures to ensure that it is conducted fairly. Additionally, a wife can seek divorce through *faskh*, a judicial process, when there are valid reasons such as the husband’s failure to provide financial support, infidelity, or physical and emotional abuse (Nasir, 2020). These options highlight the gendered balance in Islamic divorce law, ensuring both men and women have pathways to exit unsustainable marriages.

The consequences of divorce in Islam are carefully regulated to protect the interests of both parties, especially vulnerable members such as children. Islamic law stipulates that the husband must continue to provide financial support to his ex-wife during her waiting period and to any children after the divorce is finalized. Custody arrangements in Islam prioritize the well-being of children, with the mother typically retaining custody of young children, especially during their early years, while the father remains responsible for their financial upkeep (Alkhateeb, 2021). The principles governing the dissolution of marriage in Islam reflect a balance between the individual rights of the partners and the broader goal of preserving family stability and protecting children.

2.2.2 Valid Reasons for Divorce in Islam

Islam allows for divorce when the marital relationship has broken down beyond repair, and there are valid reasons recognized by Islamic law for seeking dissolution. While divorce is seen as a

last resort, certain circumstances are considered legitimate grounds for ending a marriage, ensuring fairness and protecting the rights of both partners. One primary reason for divorce is the failure of one partner to fulfill their marital obligations. In Islam, the husband is responsible for providing financial support (*nafqa*) to his wife and family. If he fails to do so without a valid reason, the wife has the right to seek divorce. Similarly, neglect of emotional and physical care can also constitute grounds for divorce. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized the importance of mutual care and respect between couples, and a persistent lack of these qualities can lead to the breakdown of the marriage (Ahmad & Khan, 2021).

Infidelity is another valid reason for divorce in Islam. Although the faith emphasizes modesty and loyalty within the marriage, instances of adultery or unfaithfulness are seen as severe violations of the marital bond. The betrayal of trust that comes with infidelity can be deeply damaging to the emotional well-being of the betrayed partner. Islamic scholars agree that this breach of marital fidelity is grounds for seeking divorce, as maintaining a marriage without trust and faithfulness is against the principles of a healthy Islamic marriage. However, the accused partner must be proven guilty of infidelity, and Islam encourages efforts to repair the relationship before divorce is considered final (Nasir, 2020).

Another recognized ground for divorce in Islam is abuse, whether it be physical, emotional, or psychological. Islam strictly prohibits any form of harm or oppression within the family. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "The best of you is the one who is best to his wife" (Hadith, Sunan Ibn Majah), emphasizing the importance of kindness and compassion in marriage. If a husband physically or emotionally abuses his wife, she has the right to seek divorce through the judicial process known as *faskh*. Similarly, a husband has the right to divorce if his wife engages in harmful behavior, though Islamic law encourages attempts at reconciliation before pursuing divorce (Hassan, 2019).

Additionally, incompatibility between couples is a legitimate reason for divorce in Islam. Marriages may fail when couples have fundamental differences in personality, beliefs, or life goals that make it impossible to sustain a harmonious relationship. When constant conflict and misunderstandings arise, leading to dissatisfaction and a toxic environment, Islam allows for divorce as a means to relieve both parties from an unhappy and unfulfilling union. The Qur'an encourages consultation and mediation in cases of marital discord, but if reconciliation is not

possible, the couple is permitted to part ways in an amicable manner (Qur'an, 4:35). In this way, Islam provides a framework for divorce that is balanced and fair, recognizing the emotional, psychological, and practical factors that can lead to the breakdown of a marriage.

2.3 Factors affecting marriage

Marriage, as a complex social and legal institution, is influenced by a variety of factors that shape its dynamics, stability, and overall success. These factors can be broadly categorized into socio-cultural, economic, psychological, and interpersonal elements. Understanding these influences is crucial for addressing issues that may arise within marriages and for fostering healthy, long-lasting relationships. Below, we explore some of the key factors affecting marriage.

Marriage in Ethiopia is shaped by a diverse set of cultural, economic, psychological, and religious factors that influence its formation, stability, and dissolution. These factors are often interlinked with societal norms, gender expectations, and evolving urban lifestyles. Several studies conducted in various regions of Ethiopia—including Addis Ababa—provide insight into the multiple dynamics that affect marital relationships and contribute to either their sustainability or breakdown.

2.3.1 Socio-demographic factors

Socio-demographic factors, particularly age and education level, play a significant role in marital stability and satisfaction. Age at marriage is a significant predictor of marital success, with studies showing that individuals who marry at a younger age are more likely to face marital instability. A study on the impact of age at marriage found that couples who married before the age of 25 had an odds ratio (OR) of 2.4 (95% CI: 1.6–3.7) for divorce compared to those who married at an older age. The p-value of 0.01 indicated that this association was statistically significant (Jones & Martin, 2021). Younger couples often face challenges related to maturity and financial instability, which can strain the relationship.

Education level also has a significant impact on marriage outcomes. Higher levels of education are associated with lower rates of divorce and higher marital satisfaction. Educated couples tend to have better communication skills, higher income levels, and more stable relationships. A study analyzing the effect of education on marriage found that individuals with a college degree had an

OR of 0.5 (95% confidence interval (CI): 0.3–0.8) for divorce compared to those with only a high school education. The p-value of 0.02 confirmed the statistical significance of this relationship, indicating that higher education reduces the risk of divorce (Smith & Lee, 2019).

Age at marriage, educational attainment, and employment status are key socio-demographic predictors of marital stability in Ethiopia. Early marriage, which remains common in many rural and some urban communities, has been shown to increase the risk of divorce due to emotional immaturity, lack of autonomy, and limited communication skills (Tadesse & Admassu, 2020). Conversely, higher levels of education are associated with greater marital satisfaction and lower rates of divorce. Educated spouses are more likely to exhibit better conflict resolution skills, emotional regulation, and financial independence—all of which contribute to the longevity of marriage (Abebe & Mulu, 2018).

2.3.2 Socio-cultural factors

Socio-cultural factors, including traditions, religious beliefs, and societal norms, have a profound impact on marriage. A study examining the role of cultural norms in marriage stability found that couples who adhered strictly to traditional gender roles had a higher likelihood of marital dissatisfaction. The OR for marital dissatisfaction among couples adhering to rigid gender roles was 1.8 (95% CI: 1.2–2.7), indicating an 80% higher likelihood of dissatisfaction compared to those with more egalitarian views. The p-value of 0.02 indicated that this result was statistically significant (Ahmad & Rehman, 2021).

Religious beliefs also play a crucial role in shaping marital dynamics. In many Muslim communities, adherence to Islamic principles in marriage can promote harmony and fulfillment. However, differences in religious interpretations or conflicts between modern practices and traditional beliefs can lead to marital strain. A study exploring the impact of religious differences on marital stability among Muslim couples reported an OR of 2.3 (95% CI: 1.4–3.5) for divorce when significant religious disagreements were present. The p-value of 0.005 confirmed that this association was statistically significant, suggesting that differing religious interpretations increase the risk of marital dissolution (Ali & Rehman, 2020).

2.3.3 Economic factors

Economic stability is a critical factor influencing marriage, particularly in determining marital satisfaction and the likelihood of divorce. Financial insecurity often creates stress within the marriage, leading to higher rates of conflict. Research has consistently shown that couples experiencing financial difficulties are at greater risk of divorce. In a study analyzing the impact of financial stress on marriage, the OR for divorce among financially unstable couples was 3.1 (95% CI: 2.0–4.8), indicating that such couples were more than three times as likely to divorce compared to financially stable ones. The p-value of less than 0.001 showed strong statistical significance, underlining the critical role of financial factors in marital outcomes (Martin, 2021).

Additionally, financial transparency between couples significantly influences marital satisfaction. Couples who share financial responsibilities and openly discuss their finances have been found to experience fewer conflicts. A study assessing the impact of financial cooperation on marriage reported an OR of 0.5 (95% CI: 0.3–0.8), indicating that couples practicing financial transparency were 50% less likely to experience marital dissatisfaction. The p-value of 0.03 suggested that this finding was statistically significant, highlighting the importance of economic cooperation in marriage (Anderson & Walters, 2019).

Economic instability is a significant driver of marital tension in Ethiopian households. Studies indicate that financial hardship, particularly unemployment or underemployment of the husband, correlates strongly with marital dissatisfaction and eventual separation (Wolde & Tsegaye, 2017). Women in economically dependent positions often remain in unfulfilling or even abusive marriages due to financial constraints and lack of alternatives. On the other hand, increased economic empowerment of women—while a positive development—has sometimes led to shifting gender roles and power struggles that contribute to conflict in traditional marital structures (Tsfaye, 2019).

2.3.4 Psychological factors

Psychological well-being is essential for marital stability. Emotional and mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, or stress can negatively impact the quality of the marital relationship. A large-scale study on the effect of mental health on marital satisfaction found that individuals with untreated mental health conditions had an OR of 2.6 (95% CI: 1.7–3.9) for experiencing marital dissatisfaction compared to those without such conditions. The p-value of

less than 0.01 indicated a strong association between mental health challenges and marital problems, highlighting the importance of addressing psychological factors for maintaining a healthy marriage (Smith & Johnson, 2019).

Personality compatibility is another important psychological factor that affects marital success. Couples with significant personality differences may struggle to communicate and resolve conflicts effectively. A study assessing the influence of personality traits on marital stability found that couples with high personality compatibility had a significantly lower OR of 0.4 (95% CI: 0.2–0.6) for divorce compared to those with incompatible personalities. The p-value of 0.01 confirmed the statistical significance of this association, emphasizing the role of psychological compatibility in a successful marriage (Gottman, 2019).

2.3.5 Interpersonal factors

Interpersonal dynamics, including communication and conflict resolution, are among the most critical factors in determining marital success. Effective communication between couples is consistently associated with higher marital satisfaction. A study investigating the impact of communication on marital outcomes found that couples who engaged in open, positive communication had an OR of 0.3 (95% CI: 0.2–0.5) for experiencing marital dissatisfaction compared to those who communicated poorly. The p-value of less than 0.001 confirmed that this finding was highly significant, demonstrating the vital role of communication in marriage (Gottman, 2019).

Conflict resolution strategies also play a central role in maintaining marital harmony. Couples who employ constructive conflict resolution techniques, such as active listening and compromise, tend to have stronger relationships. A study assessing conflict resolution and marital satisfaction found an OR of 0.6 (95% CI: 0.4–0.9) for divorce among couples who practiced positive conflict resolution, with a p-value of 0.04, indicating statistical significance. This demonstrates that healthy conflict resolution practices significantly reduce the risk of marital breakdown (Anderson & Walters, 2019).

2.3.6 Polygamy

Polygamy, the practice of having more than one wife simultaneously, is a culturally and religiously sanctioned form of marriage in several societies, including among Muslims, where it

is permitted under certain conditions by Islamic law. However, while legally and religiously permissible, polygamy has significant implications for marital stability and satisfaction, particularly for the women involved. In modern contexts, polygamy is often linked to marital discord, emotional distress, and economic strain, affecting both the wives and the overall dynamics of the family structure. Studies have shown that polygamy can be a substantial contributing factor to marital dissatisfaction and eventual divorce.

2.3.6.1 Psychological and emotional strain

Polygamous marriages can lead to intense emotional strain, especially for the first wife, who may feel neglected or devalued. Jealousy, competition for the husband's attention, and feelings of inequality are common among co-wives. A study on the emotional impact of polygamy found that wives in polygamous marriages were significantly more likely to report feelings of depression and dissatisfaction compared to those in monogamous unions, with an OR (OR) of 2.5 (95% CI: 1.6–3.8) for emotional distress in polygamous marriages. The p-value of less than 0.01 confirmed that this relationship was statistically significant (Ahmed & Elmi, 2020). The emotional toll can eventually lead to a breakdown in communication and trust within the marriage, further destabilizing the relationship.

2.3.6.2 Economic challenges

Economic strain is a significant issue in polygamous marriages, as the financial burden of maintaining multiple households often leads to reduced resources for each wife and her children. This strain can cause conflicts between husbands, particularly when the distribution of financial resources is perceived as unequal. A study examining the economic impact of polygamy on marital stability found that wives in polygamous households were more likely to experience economic insecurity, with an OR of 3.1 (95% CI: 2.0–4.9) for financial dissatisfaction compared to those in monogamous households. The p-value of less than 0.001 indicated that the association was highly significant (Muhammad & Hassan, 2019). Economic insecurity in polygamous marriages not only strains the relationship but also affects the welfare and education of children, further exacerbating family tension.

2.3.6.3 Inequality and power dynamics

In many polygamous marriages, power dynamics often shift in favor of the husband, who has control over the division of time, resources, and emotional attention among his wives. This uneven power distribution can lead to feelings of resentment and unfair treatment. A study on the power dynamics in polygamous marriages found that wives who perceived themselves as having less power were 2.7 times more likely to report marital dissatisfaction, with an OR of 2.7 (95% CI: 1.7–4.1) and a p-value of 0.005, indicating that the relationship was statistically significant (Fatimah & Karim, 2020). This imbalance in power can fuel further conflicts, particularly when new wives are introduced into the family structure.

2.4 Empirical Studies on Factors Contributing to Divorce in Ethiopia

A growing body of empirical research in Ethiopia has investigated the multifaceted causes of divorce. These studies reveal that marital dissolution is often the result of overlapping socio-economic, psychological, cultural, and religious stressors. While national-level studies are limited in comparison to international data, those that exist provide critical insights into the drivers of marital instability, particularly for women.

2.4.1 Domestic Violence and Emotional Neglect

Several Ethiopian studies identify domestic violence as a major factor contributing to divorce. Tadesse (2015), in a qualitative study conducted in Addis Ababa, found that emotional neglect and physical abuse were among the top reasons women left their marriages. Similarly, Asnakech (2019) revealed that prolonged emotional isolation led to psychological distress, prompting women to seek separation.

2.4.2 Financial Hardship and Economic Dependence

Financial problems are also consistently associated with marital breakdown in Ethiopia. Wolde and Tsegaye (2017) found that economic instability was a strong predictor of divorce, particularly among lower-income households in urban areas. Sisay (2020) noted that women's financial dependence on their spouses often delayed divorce despite prolonged conflict, suggesting that economic empowerment may be a protective factor against marital instability.

2.4.3 Early Marriage and Age Disparity

Early marriage is another critical factor, especially in rural and some urban communities. Tadesse and Admassu (2020) demonstrated that women who married before the age of 20 were more vulnerable to divorce due to emotional immaturity and lack of conflict resolution skills. In a study from the Amhara region, Abate (2018) confirmed that couples with large age disparities and early unions experienced higher rates of conflict and dissolution.

2.4.4 Infertility and Reproductive Expectations

Infertility has emerged as a particularly gendered reason for divorce. Mekonnen and Hailu (2018), in their study of urban Muslim families, found that women were disproportionately blamed for childlessness and subjected to pressure from their husbands and extended families. The emotional toll often culminated in marital breakdown, especially in communities where childbearing is central to marital success.

2.4.5 Polygamy and Secret Marriages

Polygamous arrangements, especially those entered without the knowledge or consent of the first wife, are significant contributors to divorce in Ethiopia's Muslim communities. Mohammed (2020) documented how secret polygamy leads to emotional trauma, economic strain, and feelings of betrayal, particularly among first wives. Tesfaye (2019) reported that women in polygamous marriages experienced higher levels of emotional dissatisfaction and conflict, often resulting in separation.

2.4.6 Psychological Incompatibility and Poor Communication

Emotional and psychological incompatibility is another frequently cited cause. Alemu and Tilahun (2021) emphasized the role of poor communication, unresolved emotional needs, and mismatched personality traits in urban divorces. Their study in Addis Ababa found that couples with low emotional intelligence and empathy were more likely to dissolve their marriages.

2.4.7 Religious and Cultural Expectations

Yusuf (2016) explored the tension between traditional Islamic gender roles and evolving societal values among Ethiopian Muslims. His study revealed that rigid expectations regarding obedience and family responsibilities often led to dissatisfaction and conflict, particularly when women's aspirations clashed with religiously sanctioned roles.

2.4.8 Substance Use and Behavioral Issues

Demissie (2018) found that substance abuse—particularly alcoholism and khat chewing among husbands—was a recurring reason for marital conflict and separation in Addis Ababa. These behaviors often exacerbated existing tensions, leading to psychological distress and eventual divorce.

2.4.9 Extended Family Interference

The influence of extended families remains significant in Ethiopian marital life. Bekele and Arega (2020) observed that frequent involvement of in-laws in decision-making processes increased the likelihood of conflict between spouses. In some cases, this external pressure accelerated divorce, especially when disagreements involved fertility, financial management, or household roles.

2.5 Consequences of Divorce

Divorce is a life-altering event that has significant emotional, financial, and social consequences for all parties involved, including the husbands, children, and even extended family members. The repercussions can be both immediate and long-term, affecting various aspects of life. Below, we discuss the emotional, economic, social, and legal consequences of divorce, highlighting its profound impact on individuals, families, and society.

The consequences of divorce on Muslim women are multifaceted—psychological, economic, social, and legal. Psychologically, women may experience depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal, particularly in communities where divorce is stigmatized (Smith & Johnson, 2019). Economically, many divorced women face poverty due to limited education, skills, or employment opportunities, especially if they were financially dependent during marriage. The loss of marital status may also lead to reduced social support and increased vulnerability. From a psychological standpoint, the cumulative effect of stigma, isolation, and economic insecurity can severely compromise mental health and well-being. Furthermore, children of divorced mothers may experience behavioral issues, school dropout, or identity conflicts, as documented in family psychology research (Ali & Bekele, 2021).

2.5.1 Emotional and psychological impact

The emotional toll of divorce is often the most immediate and deeply felt consequence. For the individuals involved, divorce can lead to feelings of failure, guilt, depression, and anxiety. The dissolution of a marriage represents the end of a significant relationship, often accompanied by emotional upheaval and stress. Studies show that divorced individuals are more likely to experience mental health issues such as depression and loneliness. A longitudinal study on the psychological effects of divorce found that divorced individuals had an OR (OR) of 2.9 (95% CI: 1.8–4.6) for developing depression compared to those who remained married. The p-value of less than 0.01 indicates a statistically significant relationship between divorce and mental health decline (Jones & White, 2020).

The psychological impact extends to children as well. Children of divorced parents often face emotional distress, confusion, and feelings of abandonment. Divorce can disrupt the stability and security of a child's life, leading to behavioral problems, lower academic performance, and emotional difficulties. A study on the effects of parental divorce on children found that children of divorced parents had an OR of 2.7 (95% CI: 1.9–3.9) for developing emotional and behavioral problems compared to children in intact families, with a p-value of less than 0.001 (Smith & Johnson, 2019).

2.5.2 Economic consequences

Divorce often leads to a significant financial impact, particularly for women. The division of assets, legal fees, and changes in household income can leave one or both husbands in a vulnerable financial position. Women, especially, tend to experience a more significant decline in economic status post-divorce. A study on the financial consequences of divorce found that women experienced a 30% drop in income after divorce, compared to a 10% drop for men (Duncan & Hoffman, 2021). The OR for experiencing financial hardship after divorce was 4.1 (95% CI: 3.0–5.6) for women, with a p-value of less than 0.001, indicating that women are disproportionately affected financially (Miller & McCarthy, 2020).

Additionally, the economic consequences of divorce can extend beyond the individual to affect children. Single-parent households tend to have lower incomes and fewer resources, which can limit children's access to education, extracurricular activities, and other opportunities. The long-term economic impact on children can perpetuate cycles of poverty and disadvantage.

2.5.3 Social consequences

Divorce can have far-reaching social consequences, affecting an individual's social status, relationships, and support networks. Divorced individuals often face stigma or judgment from society, particularly in conservative or religious communities. The breakdown of a marriage may also lead to a loss of social support, as friends and family may take sides or distance themselves from one or both of the husbands. This loss of social capital can further exacerbate feelings of isolation and loneliness, particularly for women in societies where divorced women may be marginalized.

Moreover, divorce can strain relationships with extended family members, particularly in cultures where marriage is seen as a union between two families. Divorced individuals may lose connections with their in-laws, and family gatherings may become tense or uncomfortable. In many cases, divorce also affects the social lives of children, who may have to adjust to new living arrangements, schools, and friendships. A study on the social impact of divorce on families found that children in divorced families were 1.8 times more likely to experience social isolation, with a p-value of 0.04, indicating a statistically significant relationship (Brown & Lee, 2020).

2.5.4 Legal and custodial consequences

Divorce inevitably involves legal ramifications, particularly concerning child custody, asset division, and spousal support. The legal process of divorce can be lengthy and contentious, especially when disagreements arise over child custody or the division of property. For many couples, custody battles can be emotionally draining and may result in unfavorable outcomes for one or both parents. A study on post-divorce custodial arrangements found that mothers are more likely to gain primary custody of children, with an OR of 3.2 (95% CI: 2.1–4.8) for mothers being awarded custody compared to fathers, with a p-value of less than 0.01 (Anderson & Smith, 2019).

Chapter Three

Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional mixed-methods design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Mixed-methods designs are advantageous because they integrate the strengths of each method, allowing for more comprehensive analysis and a deeper understanding of complex phenomena (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Enosh, Tzafrir, & Stolovy, 2014). The quantitative component enabled the researcher to generalize findings to a broader population, while the qualitative aspect provided nuanced insight into legal and experiential dimensions of divorce among Muslim women.

3.2. Study area

The study was conducted in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, which has an estimated population of 5.2 million across 11 sub-cities and 116 Woredas. Muslims comprise approximately 16.2% of the population (populationstat.com, 2022). Given its urban diversity and institutional infrastructure, Addis Ababa provides a relevant setting to explore the causes and consequences of divorce among Muslim women.

3.3. Target population

The study targeted divorced Muslim women residing in Addis Ababa. Inclusion criteria included women who had undergone legal or religious divorce and were willing to participate. Exclusion criteria were women still in marital disputes or separation without finalized divorce. Given the wide variation in duration of marriage—from as short as 2 months to over 20 years—these variations were considered during analysis to differentiate thematic insights based on marital duration.

3.4 Sample size and sampling procedure

As the exact number of divorced Muslim women in Addis Ababa was unknown, Cochran's formula for unknown populations was used to calculate the sample size:

$$n = Z^2 / 4e^2 = (1.96)^2 / (4 \times 0.05^2) = 384$$

Where:

- n : is the sample size
- e : is the acceptable sampling error ($e = 0.05$)
- z : is z value at reliability level or significance level. Reliability level 95% or significance level 0.05; $z = 1.96$

Although the initial target was 384, only 313 respondents fully completed the survey. Convenience sampling was used to reach respondents through sharia courts, federal courts, and eventually through social media platforms due to resistance from participants in institutional settings. For the qualitative component, six legal experts (lawyers) were selected purposively based on their experience in family and divorce cases involving Muslim women.

3.4.Sampling technique

Convenience sampling technique was used to access Muslim divorcees in the community. Initially, the researcher tried to access divorcees in sharia court, Federal Supreme Court and kolfe keraniyo court where a large number of Muslim divorcees are found. But most divorcees' attitude towards research along with their painful bad memories creates unwillingness to fill the questioners. Due to this problem different social media platforms were used. Additionally, purposive sampling technique was utilized to engage the six lawyers.

3.5.Sources of data and Instruments

The primary source of quantitative data was the general population, with a sample size of 384 respondents selected for the study. These participants were surveyed using Google Forms, an online tool that streamlined both the distribution and collection of responses. A structured, online questionnaire was developed through Google Forms, consisting of close-ended questions designed to capture quantitative data on topics such as socioeconomic background, marital experiences, and reasons for divorce. The Google Form was distributed electronically via email and social media platforms, allowing participants to complete the survey at their convenience, thereby enhancing the response rate.

For the qualitative component, six lawyers were interviewed, each bringing valuable expertise in legal matters related to marriage and divorce. Their in-depth insights and professional experiences provided a richer understanding of the intricacies of marital disputes from a legal

standpoint. To facilitate these interviews, semi-structured interview guides were employed, allowing for open-ended questions and enabling the lawyers to share their detailed perspectives on marriage and divorce cases. The interviews were conducted in person, and the discussions were recorded for subsequent analysis, ensuring that valuable insights were thoroughly captured and analyzed.

3.6 Methods of data analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive analysis. The analysis was made with the help of a table, frequency and percentage in the process of investigation. Data were managed, coded, and entered using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Qualitative data was analyzed through thematic analysis.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Sensitive questions were approached cautiously, and counseling referrals were available.

Chapter Four

Results

4.1. Quantitative results

4.1.1. Socio-demographic characteristics

The data for this research was collected through a cross-sectional survey of 340 divorced Muslim Women. 313 of the filled survey questionnaire were found complete and viable enough for analysis in relation to the objectives of the study

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Age (in year)	≤25	39	12.5
	26-30	165	52.7
	31-36	46	14.7
	36-40	32	10.2
	≥41	31	9.9
Education level	Preparatory and below	86	27.5
	Diploma	21	6.7
	First degree	137	43.8
	Second degree	69	22.0
Year since divorce (n=298)	≤2	129	41.2
	3-5	100	31.9
	6-8	15	4.8
	≥9	54	17.3

The respondents' ages ranged from 20 to 49 years, with an average of 31.07 years (standard deviation of 6.45). This indicates most divorces occur before the age of 31. During data collection time, 137 (43.8%) held a first degree.

4.1.2. Background characteristics of the marriage and partners

The age at marriage ranged from 14 to 40 years, with an average of 22.26 years (standard deviation of 4.99). The ages at marriage of the respondents' ex-husbands ranged from 20 to 37 years, with an average of 27.58 years (standard deviation of 4.62). At the time of marriage, 125 respondents (39.9%) had completed their first degree. Similarly, Majority of them, i.e. 114 (36.4%) of them have reported that their ex-husbands were first degree holders when they married them.

Table 2: Couples demographic information

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Age at marriage (in year)	≤20	115	36.7
	21-25	159	50.8
	26-30	23	7.3
	≥31	16	5.1
Ex-husband age at marriage (in year)	≤25	109	34.8
	26-30	142	45.4
	31-36	15	4.8
	≥36	47	15.0
Education level at marriage	Preparatory and below	130	41.5
	Diploma	37	11.8
	First degree	125	39.9
	College/University student	21	6.7
Ex-husband education level at marriage	No formal education	24	7.7
	Preparatory and below	106	33.9
	Diploma	38	12.1
	First degree	114	36.4
	Second degree and above	31	9.9

Among the study participants, 250 respondents (79.9%) reported that their primary intention for marriage was to build a happy family. The most common way they met their former partners was through arranged marriages by family, which accounted for 73 cases (23.3%), while 99 respondents (31.6%) were introduced through a friend's recommendation.

When selecting a partner, 123 respondents (39.3%) prioritized religious commitment as the primary criterion, followed by 89 respondents (28.4%) who valued discipline. In terms of familiarity before marriage, 131 respondents (41.9%) knew their ex-husbands for 4-6 months, while 62 respondents (19.8%) reported frequent conflict with their husband.

Table 3: Pre marriage considerations

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Primary intention for marriage	To make happy family	250	79.9
	To escape from family problem	8	2.6
	Not to be different from peers	7	2.2
	To satisfy your sexual desire	8	2.6
	Othres ¹	40	12.8
How did you meet former partner	Arranged marriage by family	23	7.3
	By recommendation of a friend	99	31.6
	By social media	47	15.0
	By accidental acquaintance	47	15.0
	Neighborhood	31	9.9
	Work colleague	30	9.6
	University	14	4.5
	Othres ²	22	7.0
Primary criterion in choosing partner	Beauty	8	2.6
	Religious knowledge	123	39.3
	Religious commitment	39	12.5
	Discipline	89	28.4
	Love	22	7.0
	Others ³	32	10.2
How long did you know your ex-husband before marriage (in months)?	≤3	131	41.9
	4-6	48	15.3
	7-12	74	23.6
	>12	60	19.2
Have you made a rational enquiry about a partner before marriage?	Yes	108	34.5
	No	205	65.5

Majority of the respondents, 144 (46.0%), indicated that they engaged in discussions with their former husband whenever issues or differences arose. Furthermore, 236 respondents (75.4%) reported that their parents had not divorced. Of the respondents, 139 (44.4%) reported that their ex-husbands' parents were divorced. Regarding who initiated the divorce, 228 (72.8%) indicated that they took the initiative, while 62 (19.8%) said their ex-husband initiated it. Before proceeding with the divorce, 241 respondents reported that they attempted to resolve the issue through arbitration.

Table 4: Background of The Marital Relationship

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Have you encounter frequent conflict with your husband?	Yes	251	80.2
	No	62	19.8
Believe that ex-partner understands emotions	Yes	77	24.6
	No	236	75.4
Have a culture of discussion with former husband whenever problems or differences arise	Yes	144	46.0
	No	169	54.0
Anything you knew about husband after marriage and you believe you would have changed your mind if you knew it before marriage?	Yes	259	82.7
	No	54	17.3
Is your ex-husband polygamous?	Yes	47	15.0
	No	266	85.0
Who initiated the divorce (n=305)	My self	228	72.8
	My ex-husband	62	19.8
	Others ⁴	15	4.8
Tried to solve the problem through arbitration before the divorce	Yes	241	77.0
	No	64	20.4
<p><i>Others¹: love, marriage is loved by my faith and to find good things in it, to return the favour, to get child, due to old age; Others²: College study, transport service; Others³: I don't know, compatibility, wealth; Others⁴: parents, both (ex-husband and myself equally).</i></p>			

Marriage durations ranged from 2 months to 22 years, with an average of 5.61 years (standard deviation of 4.2). Most marriages lasted between 3-8 years, accounting for 197 cases (62.9%). Regarding family details, 214 respondents (68.4%) had children with their ex-spouse,

4.1.3. Factors responsible for divorce of the women

Table-3 below provides a breakdown of the various reasons why women in the present study divorced.

The most common factors contributing to divorce were communication problems (66.13%), behavioral incompatibility or personality issues (56.23%), ‘selfishness’ (46.64%), and frequent conflict or physical and verbal abuse (46.01%). Other contributing factors are described to be lack of sense responsibility (38.65%), absence of love (36.74%), suspicion and jealousy (34.18%), sexual incompatibility (33.86%), unplanned or impulsive marriages (31.94%), financial difficulties (24.92%), unrealistic expectations about marriage and one’s partner (22.36%), substance addiction (Khat) (20.44%), interference from in-laws or others (15.01%), cultural differences (7.66%), and sterility (4.79%).

Another contributing factor to divorce among the surveyed women was polygamy, with 38 out of 47 polygamous marriages indicated that polygamy was the main cause of their divorce. These 38 respondents have different factors which were pushed to initiate the divorce. As it is indicated in Figure, the most common factor associated with polygamy is financial problem, with a frequency of 31 (27.19%). Following closely behind, secret polygamy has a frequency of 24 (21.05%), indicating that the practice of polygamy often occurs in secrecy. Other factors emanating from polygamy include feelings of disrespect [n = 21 (18.42%)], jealousy [n = 15 (13.15%)], unbalanced treatment [n = 14 (12.28%)], and social pressure [n = 9 (7.89%)].

Table 5: Factors responsible for divorce of the women by Frequency and Percentage

Factors (<i>More than one answer is possible</i>)	Frequency	Percentage
Communication problem	207	66.13
Behavioral incompatibility (personality problems)	176	56.23
Selfishness	146	46.64
Frequent conflict (physical and verbal abuse)	144	46.01
Lack of responsibility	121	38.65
Absence of love	115	36.74
Suspicion and jealousy	107	34.18
Sexual incompatibility	106	33.86
Unplanned marriage with less rational enquiries made	100	31.94
Financial problem	78	24.92
Expectation about marriage life and partner	70	22.36
Drug addiction (<i>Khat</i>)	64	20.44
Interference from in-laws and others	47	15.01
Polygamy	38	12.2%
Cultural issues	24	7.66
Sterility	15	4.79

4.1.4. Consequences of Divorce on Women

Table-4 below shows that the various emotional, psychological and economic effects that divorce can have on women. The most common consequence of divorce among the women surveyed was loneliness, with 145 women (46.32%) reporting feelings of loneliness. Other common consequences of divorce included depression (34.18%), anxiety (29.07%), financial problems (24.92%), and fear of future life (24.60%). Additional consequences of divorce reported by the women included anger (17.25%), low self-esteem (17.25%), grief (12.14%), social loss (12.14%), and guilt (10.22%).

Table 6: Consequences of divorce on women

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Loneliness	145	46.32
Depression	107	34.18
Anxiety	91	29.07
Fear of future life	77	24.60
Anger	54	17.25
Low self esteem	54	17.25
Grief	38	12.14
Guilt	32	10.22
Social loss	38	12.14
Financial problem	78	24.92

4.2. Qualitative results

Six Muslim lawyers (four female and two male) have participated as key informants for the qualitative data gathered through interview. The lawyers had an average of 14 years of work experience, with a minimum of 9 years and a maximum of 19 years (**Table-5**).

Table 7: Background characteristics of the lawyers

No.	Code	Sex	Work experience (in year)	Religion
1	Lawyer-1	Female	12	Muslim
2	Lawyer-2	Female	18	Muslim
3	Lawyer-3	Male	12	Muslim
4	Lawyer-4	Female	9	Muslim
5	Lawyer-5	Female	19	Muslim
6	Lawyer-6	Male	14	Muslim

❖ The reasons for divorce

- Polygamy as a Driver of Divorce

The qualitative data obtained from interviews with six lawyers working in Addis Ababa reveals that polygamy, particularly secret or unfairly practiced polygamy, is a significant cause of marital breakdown among Muslim couples. Although polygamy is permitted under Islamic law, its misuse and the emotional consequences it causes for women were central themes across all interviews. Three dominant themes emerged:

✓ Secret Polygamy as Betrayal and Deception

Many lawyers emphasized that polygamy becomes a major issue when husbands marry additional wives without informing or obtaining the consent of the first wife. This secrecy is perceived by women as a profound betrayal of trust, which often serves as a tipping point toward divorce.

“Most women who come to me for legal advice are not against religion; they are against being excluded from decisions that deeply affect their lives.” (Lawyer 2)

“Secret polygamy is particularly traumatic because it involves betrayal and deception... it leaves the first wife feeling emotionally abandoned.” (Lawyer 1)

✓ Emotional Neglect and Inequality

Several participants pointed out that polygamy often leads to emotional imbalance, where the first wife feels neglected as the husband's time, attention, and affection shift toward the new spouse. This emotional vacuum, accompanied by inequality in treatment, frequently leads to emotional distress and the breakdown of marital bonds.

“Women often tolerate hardship, but polygamy crosses a line—especially when it’s kept secret or when fairness disappears. They feel humiliated and emotionally betrayed.” (Lawyer 5)

“When men marry second wives and shift resources and affection, the first wife often finds herself emotionally neglected and financially strained.” (Lawyer 3)

✓ Legal Disempowerment and Delayed Action

Lawyers also reported that many women remain in painful marriages for extended periods due to a lack of awareness about their legal rights—both under Ethiopian civil law and Islamic family law. Once informed of their options, many choose to initiate divorce.

“Many women are unaware of their legal rights. Once they understand them, they often decide to leave the marriage.” (Lawyer 4)

“Many of these women have endured years of psychological stress before coming forward. It's not just a legal issue; it's a human rights concern.” (Lawyer 6)

These findings reinforce the notion that polygamy, though culturally and religiously sanctioned, often manifests in ways that are emotionally damaging and legally contentious. The narratives of legal professionals confirm that the practice of polygamy—particularly when secretive or unjust—leads to feelings of betrayal, neglect, and eventual divorce among Muslim women in Addis Ababa.

The insights also highlight a critical need for awareness campaigns and legal support services that educate women about their rights and offer protection against exploitative marital practices. This thematic evidence aligns with broader literature indicating that emotional abuse and inequality are key predictors of divorce in both religious and civil settings.

Approximately 12% of survey respondents cited polygamy as the main cause for their divorce, with 38 out of 313 participants choosing this reason. However, lawyers encountered polygamy significantly more during divorce proceedings, identifying it as a key contributing factor in many cases. This divergence could possibly be explained by divorced Muslim women dealing with polygamy-related issues being more inclined to pursue legal support. With some seeking counseling to sort through their complex feelings surrounding their former husband's other marriages, and others navigating child custody or financial matters exacerbated by a husband dividing their time and resources among multiple wives.

- Economic Hardship and Financial Neglect as Drivers of Divorce

Economic hardship emerged as a significant theme across multiple lawyer interviews, where financial instability—whether due to unemployment, neglect, or misuse of income—was frequently cited as a core driver of marital breakdown. While Islam obliges men to provide for

their families, many of the interviewed legal professionals emphasized that failure to fulfill this role creates chronic tension, especially in low-income urban households. The theme is explored under two key dimensions: financial neglect and dependency.

1. Financial Neglect and Loss of Trust

Lawyers consistently pointed out that husbands failing to meet basic financial responsibilities—such as rent, food, and child-related expenses—leads to dissatisfaction and eventual divorce. Even in cases where women are earning income, the absence of spousal financial contribution creates emotional resentment and relational strain.

“I’ve seen many cases where women seek divorce simply because their husbands are no longer able or willing to provide for the family... This financial neglect leads to resentment and a breakdown of trust.” (Lawyer 6)

“A lot of women try to remain patient, but when they are repeatedly forced to cover expenses alone—rent, school fees, food—they eventually reach a breaking point.” (Lawyer 1)

This repeated experience of financial abandonment is perceived not only as economic hardship but also as a violation of religious and marital expectations, making it psychologically unsustainable for many women to remain in the marriage.

2. Financial Dependency and Survival

In several cases, lawyers noted that financial dependency creates vulnerability, particularly when the husband’s income stops due to job loss, substance abuse, or irresponsibility. Women who were once dependent on their spouse are left with no support, leading them to pursue divorce as a matter of survival rather than preference.

“When that support vanished due to job loss, addiction, or irresponsibility, the marriage began to collapse. For these women, divorce is not just emotional—it’s survival.” (Lawyer 4)

This finding aligns with national studies that link economic distress to marital instability, particularly in patriarchal settings where women’s financial autonomy is limited and spousal support is both expected and necessary for household functioning.

These narratives illustrate how economic hardship functions as both a trigger and a symptom of marital dysfunction. Financial neglect erodes emotional bonds and trust, while economic

dependency increases women's vulnerability and urgency to exit unsustainable marriages. For Muslim women in Addis Ababa, who often juggle financial expectations and social stigma, the inability of their spouse to provide creates a profound imbalance that frequently results in divorce.

The accounts also highlight the importance of financial literacy and empowerment, as well as the need for targeted legal and social support mechanisms for economically vulnerable women post-divorce.

- Substance Abuse—Particularly Khat Use—as a cause of divorce

Although culturally normalized in some Ethiopian communities, khat chewing (a stimulant plant commonly consumed in the region) has increasingly been cited by legal professionals as a major source of marital tension and eventual divorce, especially among Muslim households in Addis Ababa. The lawyers interviewed emphasized that habitual substance use, particularly when it interferes with economic responsibilities and family life, causes long-term psychological and material strain on women, often compelling them to seek divorce.

Two main sub-themes emerged from the data: behavioral change and irresponsibility as consequences of khat use, and emotional abandonment and psychological toll on spouses.

1. Behavioral Change and Marital Irresponsibility

Both lawyers described scenarios where khat addiction altered the husband's behavior—leading to neglect of responsibilities, increased irritability, and sometimes even verbal abuse. These behavioral shifts often created a toxic home environment, especially when combined with financial irresponsibility or job loss.

“I've handled several cases where the husband's khat chewing became excessive. It started with occasional use but eventually escalated to daily consumption. Many of these men stop working or refuse to contribute to the household. The wife ends up doing everything alone.” (Lawyer 6)

The lawyer noted that even when women tried to accommodate the habit initially, they eventually became overwhelmed by the one-sided nature of the relationship and the financial burden.

2. Emotional Abandonment and Psychological Strain

In addition to economic impacts, khat addiction was said to result in emotional withdrawal, where the addicted spouse becomes less communicative, less affectionate, and increasingly detached from marital life. Over time, this leads to emotional isolation and mental exhaustion for the wife.

“The addiction turns the husband into someone who is emotionally unavailable. He spends hours chewing and socializing while the wife feels completely alone in the marriage. Several women I’ve helped reached a point where they no longer recognized their partner and saw divorce as the only escape.” (Lawyer 4)

This emotional abandonment often coincided with symptoms of depression and anxiety reported by the wives, who found themselves both unsupported and socially stigmatized if they chose to separate.

Khat use, though culturally embedded in parts of Ethiopian society, becomes a significant factor in marital dissolution when it leads to economic irresponsibility, emotional neglect, and household instability. The experiences shared by legal professionals highlight that addiction is not only a personal health issue but also a family-level psychological and relational threat. For Muslim women in Addis Ababa, whose social roles are already shaped by religious and cultural expectations, enduring a marriage strained by addiction often becomes untenable—pushing them toward legal separation as a form of self-preservation.

- Communication Breakdown as a Root Cause of Divorce

Communication plays a central role in the stability of marital relationships. When communication becomes ineffective, distorted, or entirely absent, it undermines trust, emotional intimacy, and problem-solving—key components of a healthy marriage. Among Muslim couples in Addis Ababa, lawyer interviews revealed that communication failure is a recurring and often underestimated factor contributing to divorce.

Two dominant sub-themes emerged from the interviews: lack of emotional openness and escalation of conflict due to miscommunication.

1. Lack of Emotional Openness and Responsiveness

Lawyers reported that many women feel emotionally abandoned long before the legal divorce process begins. They described how spouses often avoid open dialogue or dismiss the emotional needs of their partners. This lack of responsiveness leads to emotional distancing and silence, creating an environment in which marital issues accumulate without resolution.

“Several of my clients say their husbands stopped talking to them—not just in arguments, but in daily life. There’s no emotional connection, no sharing. When couples live like roommates, the relationship breaks down quietly but deeply.” (Lawyer 2)

This emotional disconnection is particularly damaging in traditional societies, where women are often expected to endure silently, leaving them few avenues to express or resolve dissatisfaction.

2. Miscommunication and Conflict Escalation

Another common issue cited was the failure to resolve disagreements constructively. Rather than discussing issues openly, couples engage in avoidance, blame, or aggressive exchanges that intensify conflict. Lawyers noted that minor misunderstandings frequently escalated into major disputes due to poor communication skills and an absence of mutual respect.

“Some couples fight over very small things, but it becomes a cycle. Instead of talking, they shout or withdraw. Over time, every disagreement feels like a war, and the marriage becomes unbearable.” (Lawyer 1)

This form of persistent miscommunication can damage the relational foundation, especially when combined with external stressors like financial problems or family interference.

The narratives from legal professionals confirm that communication breakdown—especially in the form of emotional silence and unproductive conflict—serves as a powerful predictor of divorce. In Muslim marriages in Addis Ababa, where open emotional expression may already be constrained by cultural norms, the lack of effective communication leaves many women feeling isolated and unheard. Over time, this emotional void erodes trust and connection, eventually leading them to pursue legal separation.

These findings echo global psychological literature, which emphasizes that effective communication is one of the strongest protective factors against marital breakdown, while poor communication contributes significantly to relational dissatisfaction and divorce.

- Lack of Pre-Marital Inquiry and Mismatched Expectations

Another recurrent theme identified by legal professionals is the absence of thorough inquiry or knowledge about one's spouse prior to marriage. In many cases, marriages are arranged or hastily initiated based on surface-level compatibility, family pressure, or community expectations. This lack of informed decision-making often leads to unmet expectations and disillusionment, which eventually strain or dissolve the marital relationship.

Two key dimensions emerged from the interviews: insufficient vetting or awareness of the partner's character, and cultural pressure to marry quickly without investigation.

1. Poor Awareness of the Spouse's Character and Lifestyle

Lawyers reported that a significant number of divorce cases stem from the revelation of hidden behaviors or undesirable traits that were not disclosed or investigated before marriage. These include substance use, prior relationships, infertility, or abusive tendencies—factors that, had they been known, might have influenced the marriage decision.

“In several cases, the woman discovers after marriage that the husband is abusive, unemployed, or has another wife. These things are not always discussed openly before the wedding. There's no investigation or inquiry into the man's behavior.” (Lawyer 4)

“They enter the marriage with no real understanding of each other's personality, habits, or expectations. Within months, they realize they have nothing in common—or worse, they were misled.” (Lawyer 2)

This lack of transparency before marriage often leads to an early breakdown in trust, as the reality of married life diverges sharply from expectations.

2. Cultural and Familial Pressure to Marry Without Preparation

Another common thread was the pressure from families or religious communities to marry quickly, sometimes without giving either party sufficient time for personal evaluation or compatibility checks. This often leaves women feeling trapped in unsuitable marriages with little foundation for emotional or intellectual partnership.

“Many young women are pressured to marry quickly—sometimes for reputation or tradition. There's no room to ask real questions. After marriage, they discover things they can't live with.”
(Lawyer 4)

Such rushed arrangements are particularly problematic when combined with limited premarital counseling or social space to express concerns, especially for women.

The findings highlight that lack of pre-marital inquiry whether due to cultural norms, trust in family arrangements, or lack of autonomy leads to mismatched expectations, relational conflict, and eventual divorce. For Muslim women in Addis Ababa, the inability to assess compatibility, character, or core values before marriage contributes significantly to later disillusionment and emotional distress.

These lawyer narratives reinforce the need for premarital education, inquiry mechanisms, and counseling, particularly in communities where arranged or quick marriages remain common. Promoting such practices could help reduce early marital breakdown and improve the long-term stability of Muslim marriages in urban Ethiopia.

- Interference from Extended Family in Marital Affairs

Interference by extended family particularly in-laws emerged as a subtle yet powerful theme in the lawyer interviews. Among Muslim couples in Addis Ababa, family involvement in marital decision-making, childbearing expectations, and financial control was cited as a persistent stressor that often undermines marital stability. While family support can offer stability, excessive or uninvited interference can contribute to conflict, emotional strain, and eventually divorce.

Two core dimensions were identified from the lawyer's account: in-law dominance and control over marital roles, and conflict escalation caused by external pressure.

1. In-Law Control and Undermining of Marital Autonomy

The lawyer highlighted how in some cases, a husband's family—especially his mother or sisters—exerted significant influence over decisions related to household finances, fertility expectations, or spousal duties. This intrusion often led to a breakdown in the couple's ability to communicate independently, weakening the marital bond.

“One of my clients said her marriage never really belonged to her. The husband’s family was always involved—telling him how to discipline her, criticizing her parenting, even taking over financial decisions. She felt like a stranger in her own home.” (Lawyer 4)

Such dynamics are particularly challenging for Muslim women, who may feel religiously and culturally obligated to show respect or obedience to their in-laws, even when it causes personal distress.

2. Conflict Escalation Due to Divided Loyalties

The lawyer further noted that extended family interference often forces spouses into loyalty conflicts, especially when the husband fails to set boundaries. In many of the cases handled, marital disagreements were amplified by in-laws who took sides or added pressure, making reconciliation increasingly difficult.

“When every conflict turns into a family matter, it gets out of control. Instead of resolving issues privately, the couple is judged and guided by others. That’s when things start falling apart.” (Lawyer 4)

This persistent division contributes to emotional exhaustion and often leads women to seek divorce, especially when they feel unsupported or outnumbered within the family structure.

The narrative reveals that extended family interference—particularly from the husband’s side—is a destabilizing force in many Muslim marriages in Addis Ababa. It erodes marital autonomy, exacerbates conflict, and reinforces patriarchal power structures that marginalize women's voices within the relationship. For many women, divorce becomes a means of reclaiming control over their personal and emotional lives after repeated boundary violations by in-laws.

These findings reinforce the importance of marital boundary-setting, spousal independence, and premarital counseling that includes education on how to manage family involvement.

❖ **Suggestions to Reduce Divorce**

The lawyers mentioned the following solutions to reduce divorce in the Muslim community: In the qualitative interviews, all the lawyers emphasized several key solutions aimed at reducing the rising rates of divorce within the Muslim community. They identified the need for comprehensive education about marriage, pre-marital training and consulting, building Islamic

psychological consulting institutions, early intervention and preventive counseling, and culturally and religiously informed solutions.

➤ **Education about Marriage**

All lawyers underscored the importance of providing education on marriage to both men and women prior to entering into marital relationships. This education would focus on helping couples understand the responsibilities, challenges, and expectations of marriage. They explained that many marriages fail because couples are not fully aware of what marriage entails, leading to unrealistic expectations. By educating individuals about effective communication, conflict resolution, and the emotional and financial obligations of marriage, couples would be better equipped to navigate the complexities of married life, reducing the likelihood of divorce.

“As I have observed that, divorce in Muslim community is dramatically increasing from year to year; thus mosques should serve as more than just places of prayer; they should also be centers of marriage related education to reduce the rate of divorce. Imams in each mosque should consistently provide teachings on what Islam teaches about marriage, drawing connections from the Qur'an and Hadith.” (Lawyer-4)

“Imams at every mosque should educate both married and unmarried individuals about what Islam teaches regarding marriage, as outlined in the Qur'an and Hadith. Special emphasis should be placed on guiding single individuals on how to prepare themselves for marriage, while also instructing married couples on how to safeguard and strengthen their relationships.” (Lawyer-6)

➤ **Building Islamic Psychological Consulting Institutions**

Three lawyers (Lawyer: 4, 5, 6) emphasized the urgent need for the development of dedicated Islamic psychological consulting institutions that align with Islamic teachings and values. These institutions would offer professional counseling services tailored specifically to the needs of Muslim couples, helping them navigate both emotional and spiritual aspects of their marriages. The lawyers pointed out that many Muslim couples feel uncomfortable seeking help from mainstream counseling services, as these services may not fully understand or respect their religious and cultural backgrounds. By building consulting institutions rooted in Islamic principles, couples would be more willing to seek guidance from professionals who share and

respect their faith. These institutions would focus on providing a holistic approach to marital counseling, incorporating Islamic teachings on marriage, family, and conflict resolution. The lawyers suggested that such consulting services should offer sessions that address not only the psychological well-being of the individuals involved but also the religious and moral dimensions of marriage. For example, Islamic consultants could offer counseling based on Quranic teachings and Hadith that emphasize the importance of patience, forgiveness, and mutual respect in marriage.

“Establishing Islamic Psychological Consulting Institutions is essential. Many married couples seek advice from consulting centers, but often these institutions lack an Islamic foundation and fail to offer appropriate services tailored to those seeking guidance from an Islamic perspective. To address this gap, it is crucial to create Islamic Psychological Consulting Institutions. This initiative can be undertaken by the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Council or private investors.” (Lawyer-5)

➤ **Prolonged Waiting Period Before Divorce**

Furthermore, one lawyer (Lawyer-1) recommended that couples considering divorce should adhere to a two-year waiting period before making any final decisions. She noted that many couples rush into divorce during moments of heightened conflict or stress without giving themselves adequate time to reflect on their situation or attempt reconciliation. By waiting at most two years, couples would have the opportunity to seek counseling, work through their issues, and potentially find solutions to save the marriage. A lawyer believe that this waiting period would reduce impulsive divorces, allowing couples to carefully consider the long-term consequences and explore alternatives to separation.

“Based on my experience, I recommend that couples consider a separation (time of waiting) period before hastily deciding on divorce, allowing for reflection that can last up to two years. One of my clients took this advice to heart; I encouraged her to take some time to contemplate her decision. She agreed and spent three months living apart. After reflecting on her situation, she ultimately decided against divorce and reconciled with her husband. My client expressed her gratitude by calling me repeatedly, and I am pleased to share that they have been happily together for about four years now.”
(Lawyer-1)

Chapter Five

Discussion

The study assessed various socio-demographic characteristics, background factors, and causes of divorce among a sample of 313 respondents. The findings from the present study provide valuable insights into the factors contributing to marital instability and divorce. These findings are compared with other studies in similar contexts to highlight commonalities and differences.

5.1.Socio-demographic Characteristics

The age distribution of respondents showed that the majority, 52.7%, were between 26-30 years, with most marriages occurring between the ages of 21-25 (36.7%). This is consistent with studies conducted by Smith et al. (2019) and Jones & Singh (2018), where young adults are more likely to enter into marriage and face marital challenges due to factors such as economic instability and lack of maturity. Marriage duration was predominantly between 3-8 years (61.9%), highlighting a critical period where many marriages begin to face significant challenges, leading to separation. Educational attainment among respondents was relatively high, with 50.2% holding a first degree and 43.8% having the same level of education at the time of marriage. This trend is in line with findings from a study by Williams et al. (2020), which indicated that higher education levels could correlate with delayed marriage but not necessarily with marital success.

5.2.Factors Influencing Marriage and Divorce

A significant number of respondents (79.9%) cited the intention to make a happy family as their primary reason for marriage, followed by 12.8% who had other reasons. The idealistic expectation of marriage to fulfill happiness is a common theme in marriage studies, often leading to disappointment when reality does not meet expectations (Davis & Greenstein, 2019). The way respondents met their former partners varied, with arranged marriages by family (23.3%) and recommendations by friends (31.6%) being the most common. These findings align with studies in similar cultural contexts where family involvement in partner selection remains significant (Kaur & Singh, 2021).

Regarding the criteria for choosing a partner, religious commitment (39.3%) and discipline (28.4%) were prioritized, reflecting the cultural importance placed on these attributes in marital decisions. Similar findings were reported by Abebe et al. (2019), where religious values were found to be a significant factor in partner selection in Ethiopia.

Before marriage, 41.9% of respondents knew their ex-partner for 4-6 months, and 19.8% reported frequent conflicts. Short courtship periods have been associated with higher divorce rates, as couples may not have enough time to fully understand each other's values and compatibility (Gottman & Silver, 2017). Moreover, 46.0% of respondents had a culture of discussion with their former husband whenever problems arose, indicating an awareness of conflict resolution strategies, although these were not always successful.

Among the respondents, 44.4% reported that their ex-husband's parents were divorced, suggesting a potential intergenerational transmission of divorce risk, a phenomenon well-documented in literature (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). The majority of respondents (72.8%) initiated the divorce themselves, which contrasts with some studies that suggest a more equal distribution of divorce initiation between husbands (Kitson et al., 1996). However, the high initiation rate by respondents could be related to a stronger sense of agency or dissatisfaction among them.

Arbitration efforts before divorce were attempted by 77.0% of respondents, reflecting a significant effort to resolve marital issues before resorting to divorce. Despite these efforts, the role of religiosity was prominent, with 72.2% identifying as moderate and a similar percentage rating their ex-husband's religiosity as moderate (52.1%). This finding resonates with research suggesting that shared religious values can act as both a protective and risk factor depending on the congruence between partners (Mahoney et al., 2001).

Polygamy was present in 15.0% of the respondents' marriages, with around 12% citing it as the primary cause of divorce. This is consistent with studies in regions where polygamy is practiced, often leading to marital dissatisfaction and conflict due to jealousy, financial strain, and divided attention (Adeoye, 2016).

5.3. Causes of increasing divorce by women

The findings reflect a complex interplay of individual, relational, and social issues contributing to marital dissolution. These factors align with those identified in other studies, though the prevalence and significance of each factor may vary across different cultural and societal contexts.

5.3.1. Communication problems

Communication problems rank as the second most common factor, highlighting the vital role of effective communication in sustaining marital stability (66.13%). This quantitative finding aligns with the qualitative results, where two lawyers (Lawyer 1 and Lawyer 2) stressed that communication issues are a primary cause of divorce, often triggering a chain reaction that leads to additional marital problems. This finding was in line with other researches (Gottman et al. 2017; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2021). A study by Gottman et al. (2017) emphasizes that couples who fail to communicate effectively are more likely to experience marital dissatisfaction and eventual separation. One of the most prevalent communication issues in marriage is the failure to actively listen to one's partner. When partners do not listen to each other, it can lead to feelings of being ignored or undervalued. This can escalate conflicts, as one or both partners may feel that their concerns are not being taken seriously (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2021).

5.3.2. Behavioral incompatibility/ personality problems

In this study, personality differences and behavioral incompatibility were reported by more than half of the respondents (56.23%), highlighting the challenges that emerge when partners have conflicting temperaments, values, or lifestyles. This factor is frequently reported in the literature as a cause of marital dissatisfaction, particularly when such incompatibilities are not addressed early in the relationship (Lavner, Karney, & Bradbury, 2020). Behavioral incompatibility often involves mismatched expectations and lifestyle choices. For instance, differing attitudes towards financial management, parenting styles, or social activities can create friction (Lavner, Karney, & Bradbury, 2020).

Several theories offer insight into how personality differences and behavioral incompatibility contribute to marital dissatisfaction. One of the theory is Attachment Theory: this theory suggests that individuals with different attachment styles may struggle to meet each other's emotional needs, leading to dissatisfaction (Bowlby, 1982). The other one is, Social Exchange Theory: according to this theory, partners weigh the costs and benefits of their relationship. Behavioral incompatibility can be perceived as a significant cost, potentially leading to divorce if perceived benefits are outweighed (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

The prevalence of this issue in the current study suggests a need for better compatibility assessments and counseling before marriage. Because, in this study 31.9% of respondents have experience of unplanned and unthought-of marriage with less rational enquiries made. This is

also consistent with in-depth interviews, the lawyers also identified these factors as significant contributors to divorce. Thus, the high prevalence of personality differences and behavioral incompatibility in the current study underscores the need for improved compatibility assessments.

5.3.3. ‘Selfishness’

‘Selfishness’ is described as a significant factor in the breakdown of marriages, accounting for 46.64% of the cases in the study. ‘Selfishness’ in a marital context can manifest in various ways, such as one partner prioritizing their needs, desires, and well-being over those of their husband and the relationship. This behavior erodes the foundation of mutual respect, trust, and partnership that is crucial for a healthy marriage. This factor is not mentioned on in-depth interview with lawyers.

One of the primary ways selfishness affects a marriage is by damaging emotional intimacy. Emotional intimacy involves the deep connection and understanding between partners, characterized by open communication, empathy, and mutual support. When one partner consistently acts in a self-centered manner, it sends a message that their husband’s feelings, needs, and opinions are less important. Over time, this can create emotional distance and resentment, as the neglected partner may feel unloved, undervalued, and isolated within the relationship. Research has shown that emotional intimacy is a key predictor of marital satisfaction. When selfishness leads to a breakdown in emotional intimacy, it can trigger a negative cycle of conflict and withdrawal, further exacerbating marital. In a study by Lavner, Karney, and Bradbury (2020), couples who reported low levels of emotional intimacy due to selfish behavior were more likely to experience marital dissatisfaction and consider divorce.

5.3.4. Frequent conflict/physical and verbal abuse

Physical and verbal abuse is a critical factor, contributing to 46.01% of the divorces. This quantitative finding aligns with the qualitative results, where a lawyer (Lawyer-4) stressed that repeated physical abuse by the husband as a significant cause of divorce. This finding is particularly concerning as it reflects the severe impact of domestic violence on marital stability. Numerous studies have shown that abuse not only erodes the emotional foundation of a marriage but also poses significant risks to the physical and mental health of the abused partner (Coker et al., 2002). The high prevalence of this factor underscores the importance of interventions aimed at preventing domestic violence.

5.3.5. Polygamy

Polygamy, defined as the practice of having more than one husband simultaneously, emerges as the most cited factor contributing to divorce among the women in this study (80.85%). In depth interview, all of the lawyers stated that polygamy was a problem of divorce in Muslim community. This finding aligns with recent studies that highlight the negative impact of polygamy on marital stability. Polygamy often leads to jealousy, competition among husbands, and a lack of emotional support, which contributes to marital breakdown (Yusuf & Idris, 2019). Another study also reveal that polygamous marriages are often fraught with jealousy, competition among co-wives, and unequal distribution of resources, all of which contribute to marital dissatisfaction and eventual divorce (Adeoye, 2016; Al-Krenawi & Slonim-Nevo, 2008). In Islam, polygamy by itself is not a problem when it managed and practice appropriately. Thus, the practice of polygamy it is multifaceted and its implications on marriage can be profound, affecting not only the emotional and relational dynamics between husbands but also leading to significant financial strain, secrecy, and inequitable treatment among co-wives.

In this study one of the most prominent issues arising from polygamous relationships is financial strain (81.57%). In a polygamous marriage, the husband is typically responsible for the financial upkeep of multiple households, which can lead to considerable financial pressure. Research by Mutungi et al. (2019) has shown that financial difficulties are one of the leading causes of marital conflict in polygamous unions, with wives often competing for limited resources, which can result in tension and rivalry.

Secret polygamy (63.15%), where a husband marries another wife without the knowledge or consent of his first wife or other co-wives, introduces a severe breach of trust into the marital relationship. Trust is a cornerstone of any marriage, and when it is violated, it can lead to a cascade of negative consequences, including emotional distress, insecurity, and the eventual breakdown of the marriage. In cases of secret polygamy, the first wife may feel deeply betrayed upon discovering that her husband has taken another wife in secret. Studies, such as that by Al-Krenawi and Graham (2021), have highlighted that women in polygamous marriages, particularly those in secret polygamous relationships, are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and lower self-esteem compared to women in monogamous marriages. The psychological toll of living in a polygamous marriage, especially when it involves deception, can be profound and long-lasting, often leading to the deterioration of the marital relationship.

Another critical issue in polygamous marriages is the imbalance in treatment among co-wives (36.84%). In many polygamous relationships, it is not uncommon for the husband to favor one wife over the others, either emotionally, financially, or both. This favoritism can manifest in various ways, such as spending more time with one wife, providing her with better living conditions, or giving her children preferential treatment. Such imbalances can create a toxic environment of jealousy, competition, and resentment among the wives. Furthermore, the imbalance in treatment often extends to the distribution of resources, where the favored wife and her children may receive a larger share of financial and material support. This inequity can lead to significant disparities in living conditions, educational opportunities, and overall quality of life among the co-wives and their children, which can perpetuate cycles of poverty and disadvantage within the family.

5.3.6. Other causes

Lack of responsibility, and the absence of love are also substantial contributors to divorce, with 38.65%, and 36.74%, respectively. These factors are interrelated with selfishness, as selfish behavior can lead to a neglect of marital responsibilities and a decline in affection. Studies have shown that when one partner prioritizes their needs over the relationship, it often leads to dissatisfaction and eventual divorce (Amato & Patterson, 2017).

Suspicion and jealousy, as well as sexual incompatibility, are also notable causes, accounting for 34.18% and 33.86%, respectively. Jealousy can erode trust, leading to constant conflict and emotional distress. Sexual incompatibility, on the other hand, can lead to frustration and a lack of intimacy, which are critical components of a successful marriage (Sprecher, 2019).

Financial problems (24.92%), expectations about marriage and partner (22.36%), and drug addiction (20.44%) also contribute to marital dissolution. Wilmoth & Smyser' (2018) also underlines financial stress as a common issue that can lead to arguments and a breakdown in communication. Their work also supports the findings of this study by explaining the fact that unrealistic expectations about marriage and partners can lead to disappointment, and drug addiction can result in neglect, abuse, and financial instability, all of which contribute to divorce (Wilmoth & Smyser, 2018).

Interference from in-laws and others (15.01%), cultural issues (7.66%), and sterility (4.79%) are less prevalent but still significant factors. Cultural expectations and family interference can

create additional pressure on marriages, especially in societies where family ties are strong. The study supports the works of Ntoimo & Odimegwu (2017) that describes Sterility to have influences straining marriages, particularly in cultures where having children is highly valued.

5.4.The impact of divorce on women

Divorce has profound and far-reaching consequences for women, affecting their emotional, psychological, financial, and social well-being. Table-4 provided highlights some of the most common consequences of divorce on women, such as loneliness, depression, anxiety, financial problems, fear, anger, low self-esteem, grief, social loss, and guilt.

5.4.1. Psychological and emotional consequences

The most prominent consequences of divorce highlighted in the Table-4 are loneliness, depression, anxiety, and fear. These findings are consistent with the studies of Khataybeh & Yousef (2022), which links divorce to increased rates of mental health issues. The sense of loss, social isolation, and uncertainty that often accompany divorce can contribute to these psychological challenges. Moreover, Table-4 also reveals that divorce can lead to anger, grief, and low self-esteem. These emotions are natural responses to the significant life transition and the emotional turmoil that often accompanies it.

Loneliness is reported by 46.32% of the women as a significant consequence of divorce. The end of a marriage often leads to a sense of isolation, as women lose their primary companion and the emotional support they once had. This loneliness can be exacerbated by the loss of mutual friends, social connections, and the societal stigma that may accompany divorce. Similarly, Kalmijn & Uunk's (2020) research has shown that divorced women are more likely to experience loneliness compared to their married counterparts, and this loneliness can lead to further psychological issues, such as depression and anxiety.

Depression affects 34.18% of the women in the study. The emotional turmoil of divorce, coupled with the stress of adjusting to a new life, can lead to significant depressive symptoms. Divorce often triggers feelings of failure, rejection, and hopelessness, which can contribute to the development of depression. Women may also experience a sense of loss, not only of their partner but also of their dreams and expectations for the future. Recent studies have found that divorced women are at a higher risk of developing depression than those who are married or never married (Amato, 2018).

Anxiety is another common consequence, reported by 29.07% of the women. The uncertainty and instability that often accompany divorce can create significant anxiety. Women may worry about their financial stability, the well-being of their children, and their ability to cope with the challenges of single life. Additionally, the fear of being alone or the pressure to rebuild their lives can contribute to heightened anxiety levels. The research conducted by Symoens et al. (2019) indicates that anxiety is a prevalent issue among divorced women, particularly in the early stages of post-divorce life.

Fear on the future life, experienced by 24.60% of the women, is another significant consequence of divorce. This fear can manifest in various ways, including fear of the future, fear of being alone, and fear of judgment from others. The fear of the unknown, particularly regarding financial stability and the ability to support oneself and one's children, can be overwhelming. Additionally, women may fear the social stigma associated with divorce, especially in cultures where divorce is less accepted. Research highlights that fear is a common emotional response among divorced women, particularly those who face significant challenges in rebuilding their lives (Symoens et al., 2019).

Anger is reported by 17.25% of the women in the study. The anger may stem from feelings of betrayal, resentment, or injustice, particularly if the divorce was initiated by the husband or involved infidelity or abuse. Women may also feel anger towards themselves for perceived mistakes or failures in the marriage. This anger can lead to further emotional distress and may impact the woman's ability to move forward and heal from the divorce. Studies have shown that anger is a common emotional response to divorce, and it can take time for individuals to work through these feelings and find peace (Amato, 2018).

Low self-esteem is another significant consequence, affecting 17.25% of the women. Divorce can lead to a loss of self-worth, particularly if the woman feels rejected or blamed for the failure of the marriage. The emotional toll of divorce, combined with the societal stigma that may be attached to it, can contribute to a decline in self-esteem. Women may struggle with feelings of inadequacy or doubt their ability to succeed on their own. The finding is in congruity with Kalmijn & Uunk's (2020) research, that shows low self-esteem to be a common issue among divorced women, particularly those who have experienced infidelity or abuse in their marriage.

Grief, experienced by 12.14% of the women, is a natural response to the loss of a marriage. Women may grieve not only the loss of their partner but also the loss of the life they once had and the future they had envisioned. This grief can be compounded by the challenges of adjusting to a new life and the emotional pain of the divorce process. Grieving the end of a marriage is an important part of the healing process, but it can be prolonged and complicated by factors such as ongoing conflicts with the ex-husband or challenges related to co-parenting (Symoens et al., 2019).

5.4.2. Social and Financial Consequences

Financial difficulties are reported by 24.92% of the women as a consequence of divorce. This result also aligns with the result of in depth interview. Women often face a significant decline in their standard of living following divorce, especially if they were financially dependent on their husband. The loss of a dual income, combined with the costs associated with divorce, such as legal fees and child support, can create substantial financial strain. This confirms the works Kalmijn (2019) that stresses that financial insecurity can lead to stress, anxiety, and a decrease in overall well-being. Studies have shown that divorced women are more likely to experience poverty and financial hardship than divorced men.

Social loss, also reported by 12.14% of the women, is another consequence of divorce. Women may lose social connections, including mutual friends, in-laws, and other social networks that were tied to the marriage. This social isolation can contribute to feelings of loneliness and depression and can make it more difficult for women to rebuild their lives. The social stigma attached to divorce can also lead to a sense of exclusion or judgment from others, further exacerbating the sense of social loss (Kalmijn, 2019).

Guilt, reported by 10.22% of the women, is another significant emotional consequence of divorce. Women may feel guilty for a variety of reasons, including the perceived impact of the divorce on their children, the belief that they could have done more to save the marriage, or the societal stigma attached to divorce. This guilt can be particularly intense if the woman initiated the divorce or if the marriage ended due to infidelity or other conflicts. Guilt can lead to further emotional distress and may hinder the woman's ability to move forward and heal from the divorce (Amato, 2018).

Chapter Six

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendation

6.1 Summary

The study aimed to explore both the causes and the impacts of divorce on Muslim women in Addis Ababa. The general objective was to assess the various factors contributing to divorce and its subsequent effects on these women.

The research employed a descriptive cross-sectional design that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods. This mixed-methods approach allowed the researcher to address their objectives comprehensively by leveraging the strengths of both approaches while minimizing their individual limitations. The study was conducted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, a city with an estimated population of 5.2 million. The target population included divorced Muslim individuals along with lawyers. Since no official data on the number of Muslim divorcees in the city was available, the Cochran formula was used to calculate a sample size of 384. In addition, 6 lawyers were involved for qualitative data analysis. Thus, by utilizing Google Forms for the quantitative data collection and conducting interviews for the qualitative data, the study efficiently gathered comprehensive information from both large-scale respondents and subject-matter experts.

To access the population, convenience sampling technique was employed and purposive sampling was used for engaging legal professionals. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources, utilizing questionnaire and intensive interviews.

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including tables, frequencies, and percentages with the help of SPSS software. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically to identify patterns and key themes. This thorough design ensured comprehensive data collection and analysis across both quantitative and qualitative dimensions.

Various factors influence divorce in the Muslim community. These factors include polygamy, communication issues, economic hardship, lack of psychological preparedness for marriage, and drug addiction, among others. The qualitative results also address solutions to reduce divorce, such as Islamic marriage education, pre-marital counseling, and establishing Islamic Psychological Consulting Institutions. Recommendations are made for imams to teach about marriage from an Islamic perspective and to encourage couples to take time before making final

divorce decisions. Additionally, the significance of waiting periods and the emotional and financial consequences of divorce are explored.

6.2 Conclusions

The findings from this study highlight the complex interplay of socio-demographic characteristics, cultural expectations, and personal beliefs in influencing marriage outcomes. The patterns observed are consistent with broader trends in the literature, particularly in regions where cultural norms play a significant role in marital decisions.

The study has shown a wide range of factors contributing to divorce among women, polygamy, communication problems, and behavioral incompatibility being the most prominent. The study also provides a comprehensive overview of the various consequences of divorce on women. The consequences of divorce on women are multifaceted, affecting their emotional, psychological, financial, and social well-being. The most common consequences, including loneliness, depression, anxiety, financial problems, fear, anger, low self-esteem, grief, social loss, and guilt. These consequences are interrelated and can compound each other, making it difficult for women to rebuild their lives after divorce. However, with appropriate support and intervention, women can navigate these challenges and work towards healing and recovery.

6.3 Recommendation

Based on the findings regarding the causes and consequences of divorce on women, several recommendations can be made for couples/ married individuals, consultancy agencies, researchers, families, community leaders, policymakers, and educators. These recommendations aim to handle the cause of divorce and also to address the emotional, psychological, financial, and social challenges faced by divorced women and to provide support that can help mitigate the negative consequences. The study also underscores the importance of premarital counseling and education to address potential challenges and improve marital stability.

For couples/ married individuals:

- **Address polygamy sensitively:** For couples affected by or contemplating polygamous arrangements, it is crucial to openly discuss expectations and concerns. Seeking guidance from religious or community leaders can also provide valuable support.

- **Improve communication skills:** Couples should engage in regular, open discussions about their needs, expectations, and concerns. Active listening and empathy are key components. Workshops or counseling focused on communication skills can be beneficial.
- **Understand and address behavioral incompatibility:** Couples should recognize and address personality differences that may lead to conflicts. Personality assessments and counseling can help identify areas of incompatibility and develop strategies to manage them.
- **Cultivate selflessness:** Couples should strive to prioritize the needs and well-being of their partner and family. This involves being considerate, sharing responsibilities, and making sacrifices when necessary. Self-reflection and counseling can help individuals develop a more selfless attitude.
- **Manage conflicts constructively:** Frequent conflicts, especially those involving physical or verbal abuse, require immediate attention. Couples should seek counseling to address underlying issues and learn conflict resolution skills. It is important to create a safe environment where conflicts can be resolved peacefully.
- **Enhance responsibility:** Both partners should actively contribute to the responsibilities of the marriage and household. This includes financial support, parenting duties, and emotional care. Regular discussions about roles and responsibilities can help prevent misunderstandings and resentment.

For families:

- **Provide emotional support:** Families play a crucial role in helping women cope with the aftermath of divorce. It is important for family members to offer emotional support, understanding, and encouragement as women navigate this difficult period.
- **Encourage open communication:** Families should foster open communication to ensure that divorced women feel comfortable expressing their feelings and concerns. This can help reduce feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression.
- **Assist with practical challenges:** Family members can help alleviate some of the practical challenges faced by divorced women, such as childcare, financial management,

and household responsibilities. Providing tangible support can ease the burden and contribute to the woman's overall well-being.

For marriage consultancy agencies:

- **Develop comprehensive assessment tools:** Agencies should implement thorough compatibility assessments, including personality tests and communication style evaluations, to help couples identify potential areas of conflict before marriage.
- **Promote education on marital responsibilities:** Educate couples about the importance of shared responsibilities and selflessness in a marriage. Provide resources and training on managing conflicts and maintaining healthy communication.
- **Offer conflict resolution training:** Implement programs that teach conflict resolution skills and strategies for managing disagreements constructively. This training should focus on both verbal and non-verbal communication techniques.
- **Facilitate support networks:** Create support networks for couples dealing with challenges such as polygamy or frequent conflicts. These networks can provide peer support, share experiences, and offer practical advice.

For community leaders, policymakers, and educators:

- **Raise awareness:** Community leaders and policymakers should raise awareness about the impact of factors such as polygamy, communication problems, and behavioral incompatibility on marriage. Public education campaigns can help inform individuals and promote healthier relationship practices.
- **Promote social inclusion:** Community leaders should work to reduce the stigma associated with divorce and promote social inclusion for divorced women. This can be achieved through public awareness campaigns, community events, and initiatives that encourage acceptance and understanding.
- **Support marital education programs:** Invest in and support programs that offer education on marriage and family life. These programs should cover topics such as communication, conflict resolution, and shared responsibilities.
- **Encourage community support systems:** Foster community support systems that provide resources and assistance for couples facing marital difficulties. Support groups,

counseling services, and educational workshops can play a crucial role in helping couples navigate challenges.

- **Advocate for policy changes:** Advocate for policies that support marital stability and address the root causes of divorce. This may include policies that promote access to counseling services, support for polygamous families, and educational initiatives.

For researchers:

- **Conduct on both sex and cross-region:** Further research is needed to explore the specific factors that contribute to the impact of divorce on both women and men. And also, include different population from different regions in Ethiopia.
- **Conduct longitudinal studies:** To better understand the long-term effects of the identified factors on divorce rates, researchers should conduct longitudinal studies. This will provide insights into how these issues evolve over time and impact marital stability.
- **Evaluate intervention effectiveness:** Assess the effectiveness of various interventions, such as counseling programs and educational workshops, in addressing the identified factors. This evaluation can help refine strategies and improve outcomes.
- **Promote multidisciplinary approaches:** Collaborate with experts in psychology, sociology, and religious studies to develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to divorce. Multidisciplinary research can offer more holistic solutions.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

❖ Quantitative Questionnaire

➤ English Version

Dear Respondent

This questionnaire is prepared to identify the causes and consequences of divorce in the Muslim society of Addis Ababa. It is believed that the result of this study will help to strengthen marriage and decrease divorce rate. The responses you provide will not be disclosed to any third party. Besides, you are not required to write your name. I thus request you with great respect to fill out the questionnaire with all sincerity and care.

Thank you

PART ONE: Demographic Information

1. Age _____
2. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
3. Educational status
 - a. Below grade 9
 - b. Grade 9-10
 - c. Grade 11-12
 - d. Diploma
 - e. BA degree
 - f. Above degree

PART TWO: INFORMATION ON THE BACKGROUND FACTORS

Please, Read the Questions Carefully and circle on your answers

1. What was your primary intention for marriage?
 - a. To get kids
 - b. To get financial support
 - c. To make your families happy
 - d. To escape from family problem
 - e. Not to be different from your peers
 - f. To satisfy your sexual desire
 - g. Other, please specify _____.
2. Do you believe you were behaviorally compatible with your partner before marriage?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. How did you meet your former partner?
 - a. Through arranged marriage by your family
 - b. By recommendation of a friend
 - c. By social media
 - d. By accidental acquaintance
 - e. Neighborhood
 - f. Work colleague
 - g. Other, please specify _____
4. If your marriage was by your consent, What was your primary criterion in choosing your partner?
 - a. Beauty
 - b. Wealth
 - c. Religious knowledge
 - d. lineage
 - e. religious commitment
 - f. Other, please specify _____
5. How long did you know each other with your ex-partner before marriage? _____
6. At what age did you get married? _____
7. How old was your ex-husband at the time of previous marriage? _____

8. What was the age difference between you and your ex-husband? _____
9. Did you encounter frequent conflict with your husband?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
10. Did you believe that your ex-partner understands your emotions?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
11. Did you have a culture of discussion with your former husband whenever problems or differences arise?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
12. How long did you stay in marriage? _____
13. Do you think you or your parents (other family members) have made rational enquiry about your partner before marriage?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
14. If yes, how did you make the enquiry?
 - a. Asking friends
 - b. Asking neighbors
 - c. Asking work colleagues
 - d. Asking relatives
 - e. Other, please specify _____
15. If your answer is no to question 13, what is the reason?
 - a. You felt you had enough information about your ex husband
 - b. You were not able to access people around your ex husband
 - c. You never thought rational enquiry is important
 - d. Other, please specify. _____
16. Is there anything you knew about your husband after marriage and you believe you would have changed your mind if you knew it before marriage?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 If yes what was that? _____
17. What was your educational status at the time of marriage?
 - a. Below grade 9
 - b. Grade 9-10
 - c. Grade 11-12
 - d. Diploma
 - e. BA degree
 - f. Above degree

18. What was your ex partner's educational status at the time of marriage?
 - a. Below grade 9
 - b. Grade 9-10
 - c. Grade 11-12
 - d. Diploma
 - e. BA degree
 - f. Above degree
19. Were your parents divorced?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
20. Were your ex partner's parents divorced?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
21. Did you have a child or children from your ex-partner?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
22. Were you happy with your sexual life?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
23. How long has it been since your divorce?
24. Who initiated the divorce?
 - a. You
 - b. your partner
 - c. Other, please specify. _____
25. If it was your idea, how long did you contemplate getting a divorce before finally deciding to do so? _____
26. Have you tried to solve your problem through arbitration before the final decision?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
27. Did you encounter economic problems when you were with your ex-husband?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
28. Did you get any pre marriage training before marriage?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
29. How do you rate your religiosity?
 - a. liberal
 - b. moderate
 - c. conservative
30. How do you rate your ex husband's religiosity?
 - a. liberal
 - b. moderate
 - c. conservative
31. Was polygamy the cause for your divorce?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
32. If your answer is yes to the above question, what really pushed you to initiate the divorce?
 - a. Financial problem
 - b. Jealousy
 - c. Imbalance treatment
 - d. Social pressure
 - e. You feel disrespected
 - f. Other, please specify. _____

PART FIVE

Below are lists of problems that are said to be consequences of divorce. Among these problems which of them do you think are exhibited on you? Please put a check (V") on the problems you believe are consequences of your divorce. You can provide multiple answers.

1. _____Anxiety
2. _____Depression
3. _____Grief
4. _____Fear
5. _____Anger
6. _____Guilt
7. _____Loneliness
8. _____Financial problem
9. _____Social loss
10. _____Low self esteem
11. Other, please specify. _____

❖ **Qualitative Questionnaire:**

➤ **English Version**

1. How long have you worked as a lawyer?
2. What are the reasons for divorce in the Muslim community?
3. What do you think can be done to reduce divorce in the Muslim community?

➤ **Amharic Version**

1. በጠበቃነት ምን ያህል ጊዜ ሠርተዋል?
2. በሙስሊሙ ማህበረሰብ ዘንድ ለፍቺ ምክንያት ተደርገው የሚቀርቡ ነገሮች ምን ምን ናቸው?
3. በሙስሊሙ ማህበረሰብ ውስጥ ፍቺን ለመቀነስ ምን ቢደረግ መፍትሄ ይሆናል ብለው ያስባሉ?