

**LIVED EXPERIENCE OF UNMARRIED WOMEN ABOVE THE
AGE OF THIRTY LIVING IN Addis Ababa CITY**

By:

Selamawit Tadesse

**A thesis submitted to center for Gender studies in practical
fulfillment for degree of masters of Arts in Development studies
(Gender studies)**

Addis Ababa University

Ethiopia

July 2018

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
CENTER FOR GENDER STUDIES

This is to clarify that the thesis prepared by Selamawit Tadesse, titled: Lived experience of unmarried women above the age of thirty living in Addis Ababa city is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for degree of masters of art in development studies (gender studies) compiles with the regulations of the university and meets the accepted standard with respect to originality and quality

Name of student

APPROVAL BY BOARD OF EXAMINERS

1. Advisor	signature	Date
_____	_____	_____

2. External examiner	signature	Date
_____	_____	_____

3. Internal examiner	signature	Date
_____	_____	_____

Chair of department or Graduate program coordinator

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all unmarried women who are pressured, stigmatized and marginalized due to their single status.

Acknowledgement

First, I am thankful to ALMIGHTY God who bless me sound health, abilities and gives me courage to perform and complete my work, and always guided me on the right path of life.

I am also thankful to my adviser Mulumebet Zenebe (Phd), for her guidance and unfailing patience throughout the year. I have learned a great deal from you and without your valuable inputs this research would not have been possible.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the most courageous and humble women who don't hesitate to share their life experience. This research means nothing without your participation.

At last but not the least I would like to thank my family who supports, encourages and prayed for my great success. It is all turn in to easier with your kind blessings and good wishes for me and my future.

Abstract

This thesis explores the deinstitutionalization of marriage and the experience of women who remain single past the expectant marital age. Being in a matrimonial relationship is deemed an important development and social task. The lack of such relationship often leads to social stigmatization and marginalization. The goal of this research is to investigate the lived experience of women of who remain single past the age of thirty, and to gain an understanding of how gender-based stereotypes influence their lives by examining their personal experiences. In an effort to better understand the stigmatization of today's single woman, a qualitative method using in-depth interview and focus group discussion was adopted for this study.

Twenty-four single women who live in Addis Ababa city were selected using snow ball sampling technique. Women from different social, economic, educational, ethnic & religious background take part in the research.

Sixteen women were interviewed individually regarding their experience of being single and eight women participated in focus groups discussed and shared personal stories of how they negotiate their status as a single woman in their everyday interactions with family, friends, co-workers, and other general acquaintances.

Pertaining to the major findings of the study the reasons to remain single differ among women. The finding shows that the major reason for women to remain single is “not finding the right person for marriage”. The right person is the one who encompass the ideal characteristics and personality of the perfect person with whom they could consider having a relationship so not finding this person make women to remain unmarried. The research also found out women used different kinds of mechanism to cope the pressure and the stigma they face.

List of Acronyms

DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
CSA	Central Statistical Authority
FMRWG	Forum on Marriage and the Rights of Women
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
UNICEF	The United Nations Children’s Fund

Glossary

Doro wet..... It is Ethiopian and Eritrean stew prepared with chicken.

Enjera..... It is a sourdough-risen flatbread with a slightly spongy texture. Traditionally made out of Teff flour, it is the national dish of Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, and Eritrea.

Tela..... It is alcoholic beverage brewed by barley or corn and flavored with powdered leaves and twigs.

Table of Contents

List of content	page
Acknowledgement	i
Abstract	ii
List of Acronyms	iii
Glossary	iv
CHAPTER ONE	1
Introduction.....	1
1. Background of the study	1
1.2. Statement of the problem.....	4
1.3. Objective of the study	7
1.3.1. General objective	7
1.3.2. Specific objectives include;	7
1.4. Research questions	8
1.5. Significance of the study	8
1.6. Scope of the study	8
1.7. Definition of concept.....	9
1.8. Delimitation.....	9
CHAPTER TWO	10
Literature review	10
2.1. State of being single	11
2.2. Definition of marriage.....	12
2.3. Historical background of marriage.....	14
2.4. Marriage as a transition to adulthood.....	15
2.5. Universality of marriage.....	16
2.6. Marriage as a social Construction Ideology.....	16
2.7. Age at first marriage.....	18
2.8. Societal Expectations of Men and Women on marriage	20
2.9. Societal Perceptions towards singlehood and unmarried women	22
2.9.1. Singlehood as Stigmatized & Marginalized Identity.....	22
2.9.2. Singlehood as a State of Immaturity and a State of Lack	25

2.9.3.	Singlehood as a Fault on the Part of Unmarried Women	26
2.9.4.	Singlehood as a State of Misery.....	27
2.9.5.	Unmarried women as spinsters	28
2.9.6.	Unmarried Women as Less Feminine.....	29
2.10.	Coping Mechanism of unmarried women	30
2.11.	Reasons for Remaining Single	31
2.11.1.	High level of Education.....	31
2.11.2.	Establishment of a Career	33
2.11.3.	Decreases the Availability of Potential Suitors.....	34
2.11.4.	Idealized image of marriage.....	35
2.11.5.	Being Emotionally Independent.....	35
2.11.6.	Failed Relations.....	36
2.11.7.	Incapable of Forming Long Term Relationships	37
2.11.8.	Family Background.....	37
2.11.9.	High Cost of Marriage and Urbanization.....	38
2.11.10.	Something That Just Happens	39
2.11.11.	Being Needed by Others/Caring for Others	39
2.12.	Fear of Unmarried Women.....	40
2.13.	Theoretical frame work	41
CHAPTER THREE		45
Research methodology.....		45
3.1	Data Source	46
3.2	Instruments of data collection	46
3.2.1	Semi-structured interview.....	46
3.2.2	In -depth interview	47
3.2.3	Focus Group Discussion	48
3.3.	Sampling Techniques	49
3.4.	Data Analysis	51
3.5.	Ethical consideration	52
CHAPTER FOUR.....		53
Data Presentation and Analysis		53

4.1. Reasons to be single	53
4.2. Unmarried women’s feelings about being single	69
4.3. Positive Aspects of Remaining Single	82
4.4. Downsides to Remaining Single	83
4.5. Unsolicited Comments unmarried women received	84
4.6. Coping Mechanism	86
CHAPTER FIVE	91
5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION	91
5.1. Summary	91
5.2. Conclusion.....	93
5.3. Recommendations	94
Reference	95
Annex.....	102

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1. Background of the study

The experience of being single has mostly been excluded from research and literature (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Yet the study of singlehood could provide valid information regarding interpersonal relationships (Kaiser & Kashy, 2005) and the personal realm (Budgeon, 2008). The formation of a long-term partnership or romantic relationship during emerging adulthood was long deemed an important developmental task (Meier, Hull, & Ortyl, 2009). It is still a commonly held belief that falling in love allows us to overcome a dull, solitary existence and that entering into a matrimonial relationship allows us to become self-actualized (Kile, 1992).

This disproportionate focus of research on dating couples and/or married people implies the importance that relationship researchers place on such relationships, and how significant they believe them to be for people in general (Clark & Graham, 2005). In contrast, the lack of studies which focus specifically on single people as a designated group further reinforces the hierarchical importance of heterosexual, romantic relationships (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). The significance of romantic relationships is specifically emphasized in terms of their role in human development, life satisfaction, and general well-being.

Heterosexual couples enjoy a privileged position in society. Society provides heterosexual couples with various social, economic, and symbolic rewards (Budgeon, 2008), simply because they are in a heterosexual romantic relationship. One such an advantage which has often been mentioned by economists includes the division of labour, for example in maintaining a household, and specialization between married people. Marriage also provides basic insurance against adverse life events. Within a long-term, committed relationship, couples expect support, expressed love and a mutually rewarding exchange of material rewards from each other (Stutzer & Frey, 2004).

The concept of marriage has been explained differently by different scholars. However generally common notions of marriage are that it is a legal, social, political and economic union between a man and a woman who have agreed to live together as couple and their union has been

recognized and approved by their societies through culturally accepted procedures (Nowbi,1997).

According to Gallagher (2004) at least since the beginning of recorded history marriage has been the most important human institution that regulates the production of children, family and society. Marriage across society is publicly acknowledged and supported sexual union. Almost all adult men and women seek to marry or form a permanent and stable relationship with another person for the sake of bearing children and raising a family in a secure, loving, and fulfilling environment (Pan, 2004).

According to Coontz (2005) marriage is a universal phenomenon because many societies in the world allow heterosexual relationship and forbid people to marry family members. Even if there is a trend of homosexual marriage in the world of today many societies in the world forbid it. As it is indicated above a marriage to be accepted or recognized as a marriage it must be legally and culturally approved. In Ethiopia under Article 629 of the criminal code both male and female same-sex sexual activity is illegal. Whoever performs with another person of the same sex a homosexual act is punishable. According to article 630 the punishment is simple imprisonment for not less than one year or in certain grave or other cases rigorous imprisonment not exceeding fifteen years (criminal code of Ethiopia, 2005). Traditional attitudes around sex and sexuality remain prevalent in Ethiopia, with many Ethiopians holding that homosexuality is a choice not innate. A 2007 Pew Global Attitudes Project found 97% of Ethiopian residents said that homosexuality should be rejected by society.

Gyekye (2002) argued that in Africa culture marriage is looked upon as a holy duty which every normal adult is expected to perform. Like many societies marriage in Ethiopia is also seen as a requirement stage in life, rather than an option and it remains to be the most important social institution that people should strive (Pankhurst, 2017).

The 2011 Ethiopian demographic and health survey indicate 27% of women age 15-49 have never been married, 58% are currently married, 4% are living together with a man, and 11% are divorced, separated, or widowed. Less than 1% of women age 45-49 who has never been married (CSA, 2011).

The 2014 mini DHS report shows that Twenty-six percent of women age 15-49 have never been married, 60 percent are currently married, 4 percent are living together with a man, and 11 percent are divorced, separated, or widowed. Less than 1 percent of women age 45-49 who has never been married indicate that marriage is nearly universal in Ethiopia (CSA, 2014).

According the 2016 Ethiopian DHS report One-fourth of women (26 percent) and two-fifths of men (42 percent) have never married. Women are more often married or living together with a partner (i.e., in union) than men (65 percent and 56 percent, respectively). Women are also more likely than men to report that they are divorced or separated (6 percent and 2 percent, respectively). Three percent of women report they are widowed, as compared with less than 1 percent of men (CSA, 2016)

According to Depaulo & Morris (2005) despite the significance attached to marriage some people remain single due to different reasons such as personal choice, external circumstances or willingness to express individual autonomy and independence from traditions and institutions. Nimisha (2013) argued that now a day in many societies around the world singlehood is becoming more common among young adults. The modern women see life with many possibilities and opportunities. While they are not against marriage they learned to create a comfortable environment for themselves, they know how to feel good about themselves and manage their lives without the presence of men.

Studies conducted by Allen (1989) and Gordon (1994) indicate that the state of being single is a result of a complex interaction between structural, cultural and biographical aspects of life. Stien (1981) categorized state of being single based on an element of choice (voluntary and involuntary) and permanence (temporary and stable). Voluntary temporary singles are people who are single, who are open to marriage but place a lower priority on searching for mate than on other activities, such as education, career, politics, and self-development. Voluntary stable singles are people who are single and satisfied with that choice and do not intended to marry. Involuntary temporary singles are those who would like to be married and are actively seeking mates. Involuntary stable singles are primarily older singles who wanted to marry but did not find a mate and now accept their single status.

Marriage is a socially constructed institution just like gender role socialization. According to Crespi(2003) the gender role socialization is learnt as we are born and carried out by our parents and other socialization agents. Gender role socialization ensures that women are married, become mothers and house wives in order to take care of the home.

According to Carga and Melko(1982) when marriage is the social norm remaining unmarried or choosing against marriage leads to negative stereotypes, biases and discrimination to unmarried people whilst this is applicable to both sexes its more significant for women who are less powerful in terms of social status, control over economic resources, and normative expectations in the society. This social stigma attached to single women makes their lives more difficult, never married women may feel personally inadequate because they have not formed a partnership.

The importance of forming a romantic relationship is also heightened by hegemonic gendered perceptions that women should be in a relationship with a man and have a family in order to be seen as successfully feminine (Milestone & Meyer, 2012). Additionally, women are pressured to achieve the goal of marriage and having children within a certain timeframe with the threat of perpetual singlehood if the goals are not reached in time (Negra, 2009). In accordance with this emphasis on being in a romantic relationship, being single has often results in single people's marginalization (Budgeon, 2008), and stigmatization (DePaulo & Morris, 2005) whilst heterosexual couples enjoy a privileged position. This is especially true for single women who, according to hegemonic femininity, fail to fulfill the most important requirement of femininity (Milestone & Meyer, 2012). Single people frequently referred to as "singles" are presumed to lead sadder lives since they lack the transcendent experience of a romantic relationship. Furthermore, lay people often assume that single people have more problems with their mental and physical health (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Consequently single people are often the victims of interpersonal discrimination and rejection (Greitemeyer, 2009).

1.2. Statement of the problem

According to Situmorang,(2007) in spite of difference between society's culture and norm marriage remains the social norm towards every society. When a woman has not married by her late twenties or early thirties there will be pressure to marry from her family, relatives or even

colleagues. In strengthen this idea Damte (2010) indicated in some rural areas of Ethiopia the mean age for daughters to be married lean on between 10.4 and 18.6 years based on parent's wealth status. If woman is not married by that age she might put herself for a risk of abduction or she may be labeled as "*komo ker*" or old maid. As a consequence, most people consider singlehood as a social failure and singles are often stigmatized and discriminated against. Whilst this is applicable to both sexes, it is more significant for women who are less powerful in terms of social status, control over economic resources, and normative expectations in the society (Situmorang, 2007).

According to Depaulo and Morris (2005) unmarried women in many parts of the world are marginalized stereotyped and stigmatized. Beside that in many parts of the world relatives, friends and colleagues put pressure on the unmarried women to marry.

Despite the growing incidences of singleness most societies still consider marriage as the most desirable state adults can attain. Consequently, singles are often pitied or ridiculed. A single woman is often perceived either as an old maid who could not get a man because she is unattractive, incompetent or a city single who does not want a man because she is highly educated, ambitious, single minded and career person. These views on single women bring difficult to the lives of unmarried women. (Situmorang, 2007).

According to (Pan, 2004) the ideal type of woman as encouraged by the Indonesian society is the one who is married and preferably a house wife. It is argued that this ideal type is used to discriminate against and stigmatize women who fail to meet these criteria.

In order to meet the criteria of a good women one must get married and obey her husband. The negative treatment of unmarried women by their communities includes the suspicion that they will instantly become someone's mistress or a home wrecker, sexual harassment in the work place and in the neighborhood, and stigmatization as lonely women badly in need of a man. (Pan, 2004)

Like in other parts of the world marriage has a great significance in the life span of Ethiopian. Traditionally when a boy is about 18, his parents look for a spouse it is their duty to ask whose daughter is best, whose father gives many heads of cattle for dowry, who has a great land for farming no matter about the age of the girl (Damte, 2010).

Even though the age limit may differ from culture to culture in most societies there is a belief that a person has to marry when he or she reaches a certain age and if a person do not marry at a certain age he or she may feel as a failure and they are pressured by family and friends to marry (Byrne & Carr, 2005).

When we see the age at first marriage for women marriage takes place relatively early. Among women age 25-49 who are married 63% married by age 18, and 77% married by age 20. The median age at first marriage among women age 25-49 is 16.5 years (CSA 2011).

In the same vein the 2016 DHS report also show that Ethiopian women marry much earlier than Ethiopian men. The median age of age at first marriage for Ethiopian women is 17.1years comparing to Ethiopian men which is 23.1years. Nearly 6 in 10 or 58% of Ethiopian women are married by age 18, compared to only 1 in 10 or 9% of Ethiopian men. In addition the report indicated that women with no education marry 7.7 years earlier than women with more than secondary education which is 16.3 years versus 24.0 years (CSA, 2016).

Since there is a high value on marriage in Ethiopian culture two in every five girls are married before their 18th birthday and nearly one in five girls married before the age of 15.(UNICEF, 2016). Due this high value of marriage it is hard to unwed and stays single, and women at certain age who are unmarried perceived as a deviant.

Clark and Graham (2005) hypothesize that research on singlehood may help us to understand different aspects of relationships and relationship processes better (for example, how the exclusive and voluntary nature of relationships influence people's reactions to alternatives, and how other forms of close relationships help to fill our need for belonging and intimacy). It may also assist in understanding interpersonal cognitions in both close relationships and stereotyping behavior (Conley & Collins, 2002). Furthermore, it may contribute to mitigating the current stigma of being single (Byrne & Carr, 2005). The latter authors argue that, through qualitative exploration of the experience of being single we can gain knowledge of not only the negative aspects of being single, but also the benefits of being single. We may start to scrutinize and challenge the ideology of "marriage and family" and accept singlehood as an equally desirable and beneficial status – consequently challenging the notion that a romantic relationship should be at the top of the relationship hierarchy. Scholars may also look beyond the dichotomous divide

between the married and single status groups and start to focus on the groups similarities, as opposed to their differences, and within group differences of a heterogeneous single group (Byrne & Carr, 2005).

Different researchers (Gudaye, 2005, Amsalu, 2007, Damte, 2010, Meron, 2017) in Ethiopia conducted a research on early marriage, divorce and the psycho-social impact of traditional marriage on women, but unmarried women received little attention in the academy. The researcher thought the reason behind this could be the topic by itself might not be assumed as a problem which needs the academic attention to be addressed. Being unmarried is not a problem by itself but it could be a good cause for different kinds of problems that unmarried women face as a result of their marital status. In addition to that the society's culture pushes women to get married as early as possible. Therefore women engage in marriage and due to this researchers will fail to see the minority groups of never married women. Another reason for unmarried women to receive little attention could be; the media doesn't give enough coverage and propagate the problem like other problems women face in our country. At last lack of pervious researches also could be a barrier for other researchers to conduct researches on this area.

Given the lack of studies on single people as an important group in itself, and the stereotyping of especially single women, I used a phenomenological method to explore women's experiences of being single and bring to light both the negative and positive experiences of single womanhood.

1.3. Objective of the study

1.3.1. General objective

The general objective of this research is to investigate the lived experiences of unmarried women who are above the age of thirty.

1.3.2. Specific objectives include;

- To examine the reasons why single women stay unmarried.
- To discover unmarried women's feelings about their marital status.
- To explore verbal and non verbal comments unmarried women received.
- To investigate how these verbal and non verbal comments affect unmarried women on their everyday life.

- To explore how unmarried women cope with their internal desire, the external pressure to marry and the social stigma of being single.

1.4. Research questions

- ❖ What are the reasons of unmarried women to remain single?
- ❖ What are unmarried women's feelings about their marital status?
- ❖ What are the verbal and non verbal comments and reactions unmarried women received about their marital status?
- ❖ How do these verbal and non verbal comments and reactions on their marital status affect their daily life?
- ❖ How do unmarried women cope with the internal and external pressure to marry and the social stigma of being single?

1.5. Significance of the study

Firstly this study will fill the gap of the scanty literature on unmarried women in Ethiopia. It will provide a deeper understanding on what it looks like to be past thirty and never been married in a society that highly cherish marriage.

The result of this research will serve as a good source of knowledge or information about the lived experience of unmarried women for different organizations who are interested in women issues.

The finding from this research will also provide useful information that may help to increase awareness regarding gender issues. The results from this study will provide significant literature to the general public especially women.

1.6. Scope of the study

This study was conducted in Addis Ababa city Administration and it does not show the lived experience of the overall Ethiopian unmarried women. Thus the finding from this study does not serve for generalization purpose.

1.7. Definition of concept

For the purpose of this study the researcher refer unmarried/single woman as a woman who is thirty years or above and who has never been married or cohabited with a man in an intimate relationship.

1.8. Delimitation

Married, Divorced, widowed, separated and women who are not legally bound with a man but currently living with a man under the same roof in an intimate partnership are not included in this study,

CHAPTER TWO

Literature review

In this chapter the researcher review the literature on marriage and singlehood which the researcher gathered prior to collecting and analyzing the data. This was done in order to justify and contextualize my study to obtain academic and ethical clearance of my research proposal. As such, due to the literature gap in single hood most of the literatures reviewed are from the western world.

This chapter is divided in to thirteen major sections. The first section is about a state of being single. This gives an overall definition of what being single means and who are called as single person and it showed types of being single. In the second section, literature on an overview definition of marriage and notions regarding marriage presented, this part is relevant to show how marriage is perceived on the eyes of the society. The third section of this chapter present the historical background of marriage and this showed the transition marriage makes from once it's arranged nature which was used as a means to family enhancement, acquisition of political power and economic empowerment to a companionship which is based on emotional satisfaction, romance and sex. The fourth section marriage as a transition to adulthood showed how marriage is perceived in the society as a right path of adulthood. The fifth section universality of marriage showed how marriage is a universal phenomenon around the globe. The six section marriage as a social contraction discussed marriage is a socially constructed idea. The seventh section age at first marriage used to give an idea about the acceptable age for women to enter in to marriage. It showed how the acceptable age for marriage differ from place to place based on economic development and literacy of the society and how women's marital age linked with child bearing. The eighth section deals with societal expectations of men and women on marriage. This discussed how individuals are socialized by the society to perform certain acts and to have certain traits based on their gender. And women are socialized to attract men to get married and bear children. Those who did not perform accordingly considered as deviant. The ninth section perceptions towards singlehood and unmarried women discussed on the notions hold on singlehood and the perceptions hold on unmarried women by the society. The tenth section coping mechanism of unmarried women discuss the mechanisms unmarried women used to cope with the negative perception and the pressure they face from the society because of their

single status. The eleventh section discussed the reasons for women to remain unmarried, women might have a single reason to remain unmarried or it might be a collective. The twelfth section gives an idea about fear of unmarried women regarding their single status. The last section is about the theories used to undertake this research. This assesses the theories used in this study, which are singlism and social constructivism theory. This show how the theories are selected and how it they fit with the research questions.

2.1. State of being single

According to Wikipedia In legal definitions for interpersonal status, a single person is someone who is not in a relationship or is unmarried. In common usage, the term single is often used to refer to someone who is not involved in any type of serious romantic relationship, including engagement, marriage, or someone who is single by choice. Single people may participate in dating and other activities to find a long-term partner or spouse

Studying the experience of being single can provide valid information regarding the personal realm (Budgeon, 2008) and interpersonal relationships (Kaiser & Kashy, 2005). However, conceptualization of single as the opposite of being in a relationship is problematic in itself: as a result of this attitude, single people do not receive the attention due to them as members of a group in its own right.

The problematic definition of singlehood was mentioned by DePaulo and Morris (2005) as one of the main limitations of the current studies on singlehood. Studies often differ in terms of their definitions of singlehood, whilst most scholarly works assume that the single group is monolithic (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Some studies merely state that their sample included single people (see, for example, Bernardon et al., 2011,) without any further explanation of how they defined single. Alternatively, other studies use the legal definition of single and include the non-married in the single population (Poortman & Liefbroer, 2010). This is problematic since non-married do not necessarily imply the complete absence of a romantic relationship. The non-married population also includes people who are dating, engaged, cohabiting, and so forth. However, it appears that the legal definition of single is not the preferred definition used by both younger and older individuals (Conely & Collins, 2002). What does matter is whether or not someone is socially perceived as being in a relationship or not. The social definition of who can be defined

as single differs according to each society (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). For example, within the global and electronic sphere, you are presumed to be single until you are “Facebook official”, that is, until you change your Facebook status in a relationship. Within other societies, however, you will only be labeled as single if you do not have a sexual partner (Clark & Graham, 2005), or if the sexual partnership is not viewed as serious (DePaulo & Morris, 2005).

Mostly the importance of a romantic relationship and its benefits has often been emphasized at the expense of single people. In other words, it would appear that single people have often been used as a comparison group in order to demonstrate the advantages of being in a romantic relationship. Social scientists often assume that such a comparison provides a meaningful and important distinction (Byrne & Carr, 2005) in which value is normally assigned to being in a relationship at the expense of being single. This may have contributed to the undesirability of a single status, and the reinforcement of romantic heterosexual relationships at the top hierarchical position. According to Byrne and Carr (2005), similarities between the two groups tend to be ignored, especially similarities where single people are just as happy as those who are married.

Many studies suggested that the state of being single is a result of complex interaction between structural, cultural, and biographical aspects of life (Gorden, 1994, Allen 1989, Stein 1985). It is not likely to be a clear-cut choice. Stein (1981) state of being single based on an element of choice (Voluntary and involuntary) and permanence (temporary and stable). Voluntary temporary singles are people who are single (never married or even married) who are open to marriage but place a lower priority on searching for mates than on other activities, such as education, career, politics, and self-development. Voluntary stable singles are people who are single and satisfied with that choice and do not intended to marry/remarry. Involuntary temporary singles are those who would like to be married and are actively seeking mates. Involuntary stable singles are primarily older singles who wanted to marry/remarry but did not find a mate and now accept their single status (Stein, 1981)

2.2. Definition of marriage

Anthropologists define marriage as a universal institution that involves residential cohabitation, economic cooperation of nuclear family. Marriage is a socially supported union involving two or

more individuals in what is regarded as stable enduring arrangement based at least in part of sexual bond of some kind (Western Mark, 1929:264 cited in Meron, 2017).

Oxford dictionary define marriage as a legally or formally recognized union of two people as partners in a personal relationship (historically and in some jurisdictions specifically a union between a man and a woman).

According to Wikipedia marriage, also called matrimony or wedlock, is a socially or ritually recognized union between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between those spouses, as well as between them and any resulting biological or adopted children and affinity (in-laws and other family through marriage). The definition of marriage varies around the world not only between cultures and between religions, but also throughout the history of any given culture and religion, evolving to both expand and constrict in who and what is encompassed, but typically it is principally an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually sexual, are acknowledged or sanctioned. In some cultures, marriage is recommended or considered to be compulsory before pursuing any sexual activity. When defined broadly, marriage is considered a cultural universal.

Legal definition of marriage is that it's a legal status, condition, or relationship that results from a contract by which one man and one woman, who have the capacity to enter into such an agreement, mutually promise to live together in the relationship of Husband and Wife in law for life, or until the legal termination of the relationship. (Wimalasena, 2016)

The fundamental basis of marriage is defined as “a personal association between a man and a woman and a biological relationship for mating and reproduction. In modern times, the most important aspects of marriage are social, religious as well as legal. Marriage differs, of course, from other sex relations by the fact that it is a legal institution. It is also in most communities a religious institution, but it is the legal aspect which is essential”.(Wimalasena, 2016)

According to Coontz (2004), & Nowbi (1997) common notions of marriage are that it is a legal, social, political & economic union between a man & a women who are agreed to live together and their union has been recognized & approved by a society through culturally accepted procedures. People in many societies marry for so many reasons. Some are for fulfillment of

sexual desire, companionship, and economic support, adherence to social support and cultural beliefs. In many societies marriage is not a union only between couples but their families and the only accepted means of sexual fulfillment. Through marriage couples are granted sexual endorsement and commitment with the expectations of bearing children and training the children on prescribed mode of behavior.

2.3. Historical background of marriage

Marriage is one of the societal requirements in most societies which are expected from the individuals. Histories of marriage revealed that marriage in the past in most societies was used as a tool for family enhancement rather than personal happiness based on love. The institution was used for acquisition of political power or forming alliance, economic empowerment and also an improvement of social status (Coontz, 2004). According to Coontz (2004: 3), “marriage served so many political, social, and economic functions that individuals need and desire of its members (especially women and children, its subordinate members) were secondary considered.” This shows that marital unions depending on the social class one belonged served several purposes to the individuals and their families. Marital alliances and arrangements were left in the hand of families who had their motives.

However during 17th to 19th century the trend of arranged marriage start to fade away and people start to choose their mate based on evolutionary new idea of love, friendship, emotional satisfaction, romance &sex (cherlin, 2004).“The revolutionary new idea of love match triumphed in most western Europe and north America”(Coontz, 2004: 4). This ideal of love match led people to invest more of their emotional energy in each other and their children than in their natal families (Coontz, 2004). In early 20th century, marriage was transformed from an institution to a companionship which was based on companionship, friendship, emotional satisfaction, romance and sex. Africa is not left in this revolutionary new ideal of love.

We are now in 21st century, and in many societies, individuals select their own match. Beside this new marriage revolution has produced a wave of options for both men and women. Since women are now getting on the productive labor force reasons to marry for economic growth and financial stability start to decline (Glynn, 2013:10). This shows that there have been changes in terms of marriage. But this is not the case everywhere in the world, for countries where there is

poverty and illiteracy young girls are often seen as an economic burden and married off girls is viewed as a means of economic survival, i.e., if a girl is married early, the family has one mouth less to feed, and the hope is that the girl herself will be better off. In other words, parents may feel that marrying a daughter at a young age can help them economically (Heinonen 2002, cited in Gudaye, 2005). FMRWG (2003:11), cited in Gudaye (2005) further notes that, “poverty is a major cause, as well as a consequence, of early marriage for many young girls under the age of 18.” In many traditional settings, poor families use the early marriage of daughters as a strategy for reducing their own economic vulnerability, shifting the economic burden related to a daughter’s care to the husband’s family.

The following sub-sections outline some of the perceptions of marriage as identified in the literature.

2.4. Marriage as a transition to adulthood

In many societies marriage is a rite of passage as well as a way of conferring adult status on the individual. Marriage was used as a tool for transition to adulthood. According to coontz (2004) for all socioeconomic groups, marriage was the most important marker of adulthood and respectably. It was the primary way of organizing work along lines of age and gender. A study conducted by (Byrne, 2000) strengthens the idea that marriage is still regarded as the preferred pathways to adult identity for women, one which single women do not take. As a result, both gender identity and adult identity are in question. A lot of women felt that they are not treated with the same respect as married persons.

Hackstaff (1999 as cited in Glynn 2013) described marriage as an institution that everyone should enter in order to become an adult. He said this is based on the idea that marriage appears to be a given that is something that is supposed to be forever. The view indicate that, in the past, irrespective of advancement in one’s age whether the individual is independent or not, one is not qualified to be called an adult unless he/she is married. However, due to education and other factor that raise individual’s status, many people who are single are seem to be independent but the women still want to fulfill those societal values like marriage (Glynn, 2013).

2.5. Universality of marriage

According to Gallagher (2009) marriage exist in every known human society at least since the beginning of recorded history of human culture marriage has been universal human institution. To Ubesekera & jiaojiang (2008) universality of marriage means that at least people marry once in their life time & also every society practice marriage. Universally marriage is seen to be legal and social union between men and women (Coontz, 2005)

The above assertions imply that in most parts of the world a man and a woman are said to be married when their union is backed by law and recognized by their societies. However evidence from literature showed that many women and men are going contrary to universality of marriage by not marrying at all. (Byrne, 2005).

2.6. Marriage as a social Construction Ideology

Due to the strong ideology and beliefs of marriage many societies and families encourage and pressure children to marry. Adichie (2014) argue that in Nigerian society we expect women to make their life choice keeping in mind that marriage is the most important. We teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don't teach boys the same. Women face a lot of pressure from family and friends to get married and woman at certain age that is unmarried taken as a failure while a man after certain age isn't married we think he hasn't come around to making his pick.

Marriage is very important in Africa and for that matter in Ethiopia. This is because in many societies in Africa, marriage helps in ensuring the continuity of one's ancestral line and also promoting the welfare of one's tribe. Due to the importance of marriage in continuing one's ancestral line to Africa people, Kaylo (2012: 214) showed that:

“Anything that deliberately goes towards the destruction or Obstruction of human life is regarded as wicked and evil. Therefore anybody who under normal conditions refuses to get married is committing a major offense in the eyes of the society and people will be against him/her”.

Kaylo (2012) further indicates that in some parts of Africa parents choose marriage partners for their children even before they are born. This is to make absolutely sure that they do get someone to marry. These views imply that many African societies cherish marriage so much that

singlehood is discouraged. Thus, in some parts of Africa, parents choose potential suitors for their daughters before they become adults.

Traditionally in Ethiopia the grooms parent search for a bride for their son. Before they make any contact with the bride's parent they investigate to make sure that the families are not related by blood. In the past they search back seven generations, but now five generation is acceptable once this has been done, the boy's parent make contact with prospective bride's parents through a mediator. The mediator goes to the home of the potential bride and asks if their daughter will marry the son of the other parents. The bride's parents often impose conditions and the mediator will take the message to the groom's parents, and then arranges a date for both parents to meet at a mutually convenient location. The proposal usually involves elders who travel from the groom's house to the parents of the bride to ask for the marriage. When the parents have reached an agreement the man and woman get engaged. The parent then set wedding date and they meet all the wedding expenses. The bride and groom first see each other on their wedding day (Solomon, 2003).

In Ethiopia when a girl reaches early adolescent age without any marriage proposal or agreement so far, it becomes a source of serious concern for the family and relatives. All show concern and privately search for a proper partner. The mother of the girl confidentially shares her concern to fellow women. The father might spread rumors, that he would contribute a piece of land or so many animals in case an interested family approaches him for the hand of his daughter (Haile, 1994, cited in Amsalu, 2007).

.Perceptions of womanhood to Amadiume (1987) refers to beliefs, notions and ideas people have about females in terms of what they represent in their relationship to men as well as expectations about their appropriate roles. Many people expect women to marry in order to fulfill their duties as women. Similarly Reynolds & Wetherell (2003) advanced that in many society femininity and motherhood are based on the idea of having connection with a man due to this many societies do not approve of unmarried status because women are supposed to have a relationship with men in the form of marriage to have children. The idea of women having connection with a man is based on the belief that women need men to protect and care for them. This is the reason why a woman irrespective of her position in a society, without heterosexual relationship with a man is perceived to be incomplete (Sharp & Ganong,2011)

However things are changing to the extent that ideology of marriage and motherhood which has promoted has been questioned ideologically and behaviorally in recent years. Dzokoto and Darkwah (2004:6) “assertion that individuals are active shapers of the culture that shapes them brings to mind the notion that women are active in the determination of how womanhood is and will be interpreted and defined.” As women embrace, reject, maintain, and champion changes in today’s African society, these behaviors impact how being a woman is perceived.

It is important to note that women presently in many developed and western societies have so many opportunities, choices available to them which make them to be confined to roles and positions embedded in tradition of marriage. Now days there are opportunities available to them making them independent and the idea women needs a man for economic support decline therefore, many women would like to marry when they are ready and get the men of their choices (Haralambos and Holborn,2008).

According to Damte (2010) in rural area of Ethiopia when a woman reach around 13 and above years old, parents would think about their daughter’s marriage. Parents do not want their daughter to be a victim of “Komo ker”. Hence, irrespective of wealth status, every parent wants to marry-off his/her daughter early.

2.7. Age at first marriage

Being on the single scene and looking for a partner is acceptable up to a certain age. A younger women looking for a partner or spouse fulfils her gender expectations. Being on the scene as an older, sexually available single woman however is not acceptable both by single women, as well as by others. The problems of looking for a partner can no longer be talked about openly with friends or family, as older women do not want to be seen as looking for a man or that desperate (Rebecca, 2014).

The acceptable age for people to get married is varied from one society to another based on modernization and economic growth of that country when we see the age at first marriage in U.S.A it accounts only 20 percent of Americans aged 18 to 29 are married, when it compares to 60 percent in 1960. The median age of first marriage for women from the time they start recording it, which was 1890 until 1980 that median age of first marriage for women fluctuated only between 20 and 22. In the 1990 it jumped to over 23, which is a huge jump from having

been on the small range for so long. Today for women it is over 27 so when we look at the sort of historical picture, there is this relatively flat line for more than 100 years and now there is not just a jump over the line, but way over that line (Rebecca, 2014).

Rural women in particular tend to marry at a very young age than their husbands. In the past it used to be the custom for the bride groom to be 30 years of age before he get married (Solomon, 2003, cited in Meron, 2017).

“In many societies men get married at a much older age than women or girls, and this is even reflected in some national laws where the legal minimum age for boys may be two or three years more than that for girls. Ethiopian Civil Code of 1960, which sets, the minimum age of marriage for girls at 15 years and that of boys at 18 years, was revised through concerted advocacy for gender sensitive revision of the Penal Code by women’s organizations as well as other gender progressive organizations. Such consultation resulted in a considerable number of gender egalitarian provisions, establishing equality in marriage and divorce. According to the revised family code, the minimum legal age of marriage for both girls and boys is 18 years (FMRWG, 2003 cited in Gudaye, 2005)

According to (Caroline, 2003). Younger brides may be preferred for a number of reasons. Women who are younger have longer reproductive lives during which to have children. In regions where fertility is high, and/or infant mortality rates are high, there will be a stronger demand for younger brides. Men and their families may also view younger brides as more desirable because they are more easily controlled, and less assertive, because of their lack of physical, mental and emotional maturity. In support of this Retnaningsih, (2012) argued in Indonesia Males are privileged to marry younger females, even those half their age, because of the reasoning that men can still be reproductive until 50 or even older. Women 35 years or older are considered a risk when it comes to childbearing, an essential aspect of marriage in Indonesia. Due to this reason many parents and families become concerned when their daughters, age 28 years or older, have completed a college degree and have found jobs, but have not yet married.

In Palestine the best age for a young woman to marry is in her early to mid twenties. However particularly in village settings, girls usually married at an earlier age at 18 or younger and that their own chances of marriage after that age were small. Since the grooms families and the

perspective husbands really like a girl who is in her 15 or 16, a maximum of 20. And this is mainly because of the belief that a husband should raise her with his own hand (Pereira, 2014)

Due to this expectations and ideology women in many societies as well as in Ethiopia are expected to marry early. In Ethiopia, two in every five girls are married before their 18th birthday and nearly one in five girls married before the age of 15. Early marriage is still experienced by most Ethiopian women (UNCIFE, 2016). And women are generally expected to marry and most women do so before their 30s.

According Ethiopian the 2014 DHS report the proportion of women the age 15-49 who have never been married is notably higher among men than among women (44 percent versus 27 percent). About half the men (52 percent) are currently married, 2 percent are living together with a woman, and 3 percent are either divorced, separated, or widowed. A significant proportion of men marry when they are age 25 or older, in contrast to women, who tend to marry before the age of 25. For example, 60 percent of women age 20-24 are in union, compared with only 25 percent of men in the same age group. Like women, however, virtually all men have married by the time they reach age 50. Over the past six years the proportion of Ethiopian women who have never married has increased slightly, from 25 percent in 2005 to 27 percent in 2011, and the proportion of women currently married or living together has decreased slightly, from 65 percent in 2005 to 62 percent in 2011. (CSA, 2014)

2.8. Societal Expectations of Men and Women on marriage

Traditionally in many societies there are gender roles that are assigned to both males & females. Mitchell (2014) defines gender roles as traits, behaviors and attitudes that are assigned for women and men. Those roles are expected by the society to be performed by male and female. Traditionally feminine roles are associated with closeness and solidarity, whereas traditionally masculine roles associate with power and status (Tannen, 1990).

According to Crespi,(2003). The way we behave and think is the final product of socialization. Since the moment we are born, we are being molded to be what the society wants us to be. Through socialization individuals learn what is culturally appropriate and inappropriate for both genders. This means that in every society individuals behavior and desire are determined by the society, the family and the individual as well. Thus socially assigned roles for boys/men and

girls/women must strictly be adhered to by the individual; failure to do so comes with many perceptions about that particular individual. Each individual must be what the society wants him/her to be; not what he/she wants to be. Even though individuals try to be what society expects of them, in trying to conform to gender roles, they deal differently with the tension of conforming.

Socialization is the process, through which the child becomes an individual respecting his /her environment's laws, norms and customs. Gender socialization is a more focused form of socialization; it is how children of different sexes are socialized into their gender roles. This implies that just as an individual finds himself/herself in a given society, he/she is automatically taught what to do and what not to do as a boy/man or a girl/woman. Women/girls are taught to follow particular behaviors and attitudes supposed to be observed by the society.(Crespi 2003)

Traditionally men are to marry, become heads of the families, aggressive, independent, bold, and hard working so that they can take care of their families. Women on other hand are expected to attract a man and marry, belong to home, be good wife and a mother. They are valued for their look but not their strength or brains. If they are ambitious, demanding and tough they are considered as unfeminine (Crespi, 2003).

For human beings there is no essential femaleness or maleness, femininity or masculinity, womanhood or manhood, but once gender is ascribed, the social order constructs and holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations. Individual may vary on many of the components of gender and many shift genders status their society recognizes. In the process, they re-create their society's version of women and men. If we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements. If we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individual not as the institutional arrangement may be called to account for our characters, motives and predispositions. (West & Zimmarma 1987, cited in Lober, 1994)

Individuals in a given society are called to account for their characters, motives and predispositions when they are seemed to be going contrary to what their societies expect of them as women and men. Nevertheless, many individuals challenge these gender roles expectations in so many situations.

2.9. Societal Perceptions towards singlehood and unmarried women

This section discussed five prominent themes regarding the negative perceptions hold on unmarried women and single hood. The first time discussed about people’s perception about unmarried women as spinster, the second them discuss perceptions towards un married women as less feminine, the third them is about singlehood as state of immaturity and state of lack, the fourth the about singlehood as a fault on the part of unmarried women, the final theme discuss singlehood as a state of misery.

2.9.1. Singlehood as Stigmatized & Marginalized Identity.

Single people are often described as lonelier, less attractive, less satisfied with their lives, more neurotic, less warm and caring, and having a lower self-esteem than non-single people. Some comparative studies indeed indicated that single people are less satisfied with the status of their relationships (Greitemeyer, 2009), and are significantly romantically lonelier when compared to those in a committed relationship (Bernardon et al., 2011; Van der Watt, 2012). It is also habitually assumed that single people have been deprived of the transcendent experience of a romantic relationship (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). This negative attitude towards single people often leads to the stigmatization and discrimination of single people, including their marginalization (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Such discrimination includes, for example, a landlord’s preference for married tenants. Proof of the persistence of such stigmatization (also termed singlism) is found in studies which document the negative attitude towards single people (DePaulo & Morris, 2005).

The stigmatization of single people often carries a gender bias (Bell & Yans, 2008, cited in van der watt, 2015). Single women are frequently presumed to be neurotic, promiscuous and dangerous, and are seen as “old maids” (Koropecjy-Cox, 2005, cited in Van der watt, 2015).

Another term used to describe single women especially of a more advanced age is “spinster” (Gordon, 2003). On the other hand, single men are often referred to as the “eligible bachelors” (Baumbusch, 2004, cited van der watt, 2015). Yet, colloquially, these terms have vastly different connotations. The *old maid*, for example, can be colloquially defined as:

A woman who has passed the age at which women typically marry derogatory term; “maid” is short for “maiden” meaning “virgin”, and stems from the former presumption that a women who had neither married nor had children was a virgin (Contrarian, 2010, cited in Van der watt, 2015).

Another colloquial definition of an old maid includes four attributes: the assumption that the person is a virgin or sexually fastidious; that she is sexually aloof and shows little to no interest in men; and that she is over particular, pernickety and shallow. Lastly, this definition also comes with the prediction that she will die a virgin, without having been in a long-term relationship, and alone (Madaoxsama, 2009, cited in Van der watt, 2015). On the other hand, some colloquial definitions for a bachelor includes that “he is someone who understand the TRUE definition of MARRIAGE (Marriage is the #1 cause of divorce)” (Comanche, 2009, cited in Van der watt, 2015). Another definition holds that a bachelor is an unmarried man and a women’s dream man, who flirts at almost any occasion (Bootywarrior, 2013, cited in Van der watt, 2015). Whilst these definitions are not academic, they do provide valuable insight into the way lay people use terms such as “old maid” and “bachelor”.

Literature on unmarried women and singlehood reveal that stigmatization and marginalization are still the dominant marks of singlehood. The extent to which singlehood is stigmatized is closely tied to context (Depaulo, & Morris 2005). Hertel et al(2007: 156) conducted a research on single and married and concluded that “it is true that singleness is regarded and commonly accepted as a transitional state at a young age a forty year old single is much more stigmatized than a 25 year old single”. To them the degree to which singlehood is stigmatized is closely linked to context. The reason being that whose age are within twenty something in many societies are regarded to be at the appropriate age for marriage while women in their forty and above are perceived by the society as to old for a man to marry so this implies that in many societies marriage is something that have a deadline and women are something with and expiry date.

Single women are socially boycotted and victimized, psychologically they are subjected to mental tensions, and sexually they are totally vulnerable. He posits that if single women are economically dependent they find themselves doubly abused and exploited. This simply means

socially unmarried women are regarded by people as different humans, they are forbidden to do certain things that their married counterparts may do like having sexual relation with a man and also people shun their company.

To Reynolds and Wetherell(2003), unmarried women have many explanations and questions to answer in regards to circumstances behind their single status. They argue that: Women in long term relationships do not tend to be asked (in a concerned tone of voice), for example, “how did you end up married?” Apology and confessions are not the dominant discursive genres for these accounts. The single woman, in ‘contrast is expected to have an explanation for her ‘condition’, preferably a story of ‘circumstances’ and ‘missed opportunities’ or one that blames herself for being unable to hold a man(p.2).

The above quote implies unmarried women are expected to explain and justify being never married at their age. They are told by families and friends that they were too picky in terms of the men they found attractive. They must be ready to answer the question why? What? And how come they are unmarried while members of their societies think at certain point in their lives they must be married. They are expected to tell circumstances behind their status or certain behaviors that led them to still be single.

In support of this Byrne, (2000) stated that women participated in his study routinely commented that their singleness is always a matter for discussion, curiosity and a basis for inquiry from others. Most people assumed that women in their thirties are married: if they are not, they are required to explain their single status.

Women believe that being single excludes them from the rest of society, describing themselves as outsiders looking in critically irrespective of age, income, education, occupation, home-ownership, socio-economic status, presence or absence of a partner or network of friends, whether caring for a parent or other person, all talk about the presence and experience of single stigma in their lives (Bayrne, 2000).

Women described family occasion, birthdays, weddings, holydays, dinner parties, social settings in which most people are coupled or tied by parent, child and intimate family relationships as being particularly challenging for them and the least inviting. Due to that most women refuse all dinner invitations or work celebrations which emphasize their singleness. Coupled and family

social events mark the single woman as an outsider, as different and are settings which provide opportunities for others to inquire why women remain single. These occasions are reminders that others perceive single women as different and expect women to account for this difference, these reminders are painful (Byrne, 2000).

Literature also reveals that when people want to maintain self-esteem and status quo, they resort to use of discrimination and stigmatization. A research conducted by Yamamoto (2013), showed that, because single are seen as threats to ideology of marriage, they tend to be discriminated against. “Maintaining self-esteem is one motivation which impels married persons to discriminate. This motive is universal. People often try to justify their status quo and derogate out-groups to sustain their self-esteem.”(Yamamoto,2013:5).

2.9.2. Singlehood as a State of Immaturity and a State of Lack

According to Singerman (2007) the cultural meaning of adulthood is still defined by marriage. A girl becomes a woman when she is married, whether she is sixteen or sixty. An unmarried woman is seen not be mature enough to be an adult until she finds a husband. This idea comes about as a result of conventional marital ideology which perpetuates the notion that a woman does not have an adult identity except in relation to another. A woman must be a daughter, a wife, or a mother in order to exist. (Depaul & Morris,2005).

The views of Sharp and Ganong (2007) showed that societies perceive femininity of woman based on her connection with a man to protect and care for her. This implies a woman who is unmarried is likely to be seen as abnormal woman, and someone who may lack protection because a man in a woman’s life is her protector. Sharp and Ganong (2007), stressed that society perceives a woman not fully accomplished despite her accomplishing education and career unless she says is married. To Sharp and Ganong irrespective of a woman’s achievement in life, society still sees her not to be accomplished unless she ties the knot with a man.

According to De Paulo and Morris (2006: 251) “singles were often described as immature, lonely, ugly and in-secure as compared to married women who were likely be viewed as mature, stable, honest, kind and loving.” Dalton (1992) similarly indicated that unmarried women are viewed as lonely and not having someone there for them. In contradiction with this McErlean,(2012). Argues that singleness has a positive side because it makes people to be self-reliant.

Child-free women also described as cheap, thoughtless, immature, irresponsible, and unwilling to give up their self-indulgent life style. A woman is incomplete or deficient in some way when she has not given birth. Marriage and children are assumed necessary to complete a woman's life. Therefore, women who is not married and didn't give birth are commonly represented as unfulfilled, and their life is considered as not a well-rounded, appealing life.(White,2010).

In summary, many societies in the world tend to see unmarried woman as lonely who does not have any one there for her, irrespective of her position in the society, as immature, and someone who is not truthful.

2.9.3. Singlehood as a Fault on the Part of Unmarried Women

Unmarried women are blamed because people think they must have some character problem to remain single. Morris et al. (2007) stress this idea by saying unmarried persons often are viewed as responsible for their single status people think they are single because of their promiscuity, immaturity, self-centeredness, or a lack of personal discipline.

From the statement one can say that if a woman is seen to be responsible for her own single status, it implies such a woman might have done something wrong like her inability to get a man, she might seem to have some faulty life style, or she might appear to her society as someone who is too timid and shy and for that reason unable to get close to a man. This can also mean that people do not really care, so far as a woman remains single, to society, she must be having some character problems. Byrne(2003) stress that "social identities for single women revolved around stereotyped of fussy, selfish, choosy, spinsters, dried up ,old, women who hated men, women who were left on the shelf and women who had something with them."

The above connotations are derogatory, and perhaps insulting. Unmarried woman is said to be particular when she appears not to compromise on any man at all just in the name of marriage or not to settle for any man that she does not like. When it is said that unmarried women hate men it means they do not want to have anything to do with a man. Besides when woman is viewed as wall flowers and left on the shelf, it may imply many people see unmarried women as people who seem to have problems with men, old looking, and women who have been forgotten by other people in their societies (Agbogli, 2015)

Byrene (2000) argued that single women's sexuality is openly and publicly scrutinized by others: women are reminded about their lack of sexual relationship with a man in the constant comments and queries of family, friends and strangers. A woman's sexuality is securitized whether she is celibate or seeking sexual relationship. Single women said they are perceived as either man-haters or man-hunters. Married women are also perceived of single women as seductress and as a threat to their own marital relationship. Being on the single scene, looking for a partner is acceptable up to a certain age: a younger woman looking for "Mr. Right" fulfils gender expectations. Being on the scene as an older, sexually available single woman however, is not accepted. The problems of looking for a partner can no longer be talked about openly with friends or family, as older women do not want to be seen as looking for a man or that desperate.

The above perceptions of unmarried women make it difficult for them to have friendly relationship with many men because married people may see them to be seductive. Unmarried women who try to have friendship with many men are openly securitized by others who think they might be having illicit sexual relationship with such men. Besides, if an unmarried woman decides not to have friendship with men she is constantly asked to have relationship with a man in order to marry. Unmarried women have many questions to answer from friends, relatives, and even strangers. However some are also perceived as hunters who are desperately looking for people's husband if they cannot find their own. These attitudes make it difficult for unmarried women to openly tell friends' about their desires for a lover because she might be perceived to be desperate by their married counterparts or other members of the society (Stimorgan, 2007).

2.9.4. Singlehood as a State of Misery

Traditionally a women's life designed as heterosexual romance and marriage as the ultimate success, with a normative progression from heterosexual courting and engagement phase through to culmination in marriage, at which point the woman's story ends. This narrative obscure women's agency and selfhood beyond heterosexual romantic relationships, constitutes an obstacle to unmarried women's acceptance of their own lifestyles as valid, ignores the possibility that women might positively chosen to remain unmarried and contributes to cultural images of the unmarried women as miserable, desperate and flawed. Remaining unmarried is consequently regarded as a failure rather than a choice, a woman who cannot get a man be loser, she is

regarded as deviant and worthy of pity, as she must have insufficient resource to attract a husband (Greer,1999).

A study conducted in Palestine by Pereira (2014) strengthens this idea, Unmarried women who participated in a focus group discussion stated that they did not locate the source of the misery in their lack of a spouse rather the problem was the community response to their unmarried state. Unmarried women could be happy if there was no society to say old maids and spinsters. Unmarried women could be happy if they have a good work and stable employment.

2.9.5. Unmarried women as spinsters

During the nineteenth century, women who remained single past the age they were supposed to marry were called spinsters. The term spinster as indicated early on is not a favorable term. It came from the act of spinning cloth; a job that was first task given to unmarried women in order to let them earn a living. Haskel (1988 in Glynn 2013:2) showed how spinsters were depicted in this way:

“Like witch, spinster, was a scare word, a stereotype that served to embrace and isolate a group of women of vastly different disposition, talents, situations, but whose common bond, never becoming half of a pair, was enough to throw into question the rules and presumed priorities on which society was found.”

The above cot indicated that unmarried women were viewed in many societies as people who appeared to be abnormal to their societies irrespective of their abilities and talents.

Haile Gabriel (1994), cited in Amsalu (2007) noted that at late adolescent age, an un-wedded daughter would be stigmatized as an “old maid” (*Komo ker*), which is embarrassing to the parents. They might also be labeled as poor, because poor families are not usually in a position to marry off their daughters at an early age. Further, he added that most farmers marry off their children before the age of twelve (i.e., before puberty). It is girls from poor families that marry after that age.

Spinster and old maids are terms still used in western culture to designate a woman’s never married status. According to him, the language that people use further functions to enhance stigma in sense that people are referred to as unmarried or never-married; the terms have

negative connotations meaning a state of lacking. This implies that until a woman is married, it appears she may be viewed as a woman who is lacking something that is necessary for her to have. Marriage is tied to a woman's sense of having everything she needs for her to live as a normal human (Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003).

The above also shows that in the 19th century unmarried women in western society generally called spinsters. The history of the term spinster does not depict positive image but rather negative connotations as indicated in the above paragraph. In summary, one can say that many societies cherish marriage so much that in the past, women who did not marry tend to be viewed negatively. There are other labels of unmarried women; a few of these are identified in the following sub-sections.

2.9.6. Unmarried Women as Less Feminine

Cockrum and White(1985: 155 cited in Gorden 2003). Argued that unmarried woman is seen to be barren so she does not know how to nurture babies. In their views, although it is somehow acceptable for a man to choose to remain single, women who chose this path often seen as less feminine, less loving, and nurturing, less sexually attractive and more selfish. Unmarried women are also seen not to be beautiful to appeal to the eyes of men that is why they are single. While in most societies men, who decide to remain single, do not have issues with negative perception as compared with women.

Historically, heterosexual romance and marriage have been central to the fulfillment of femininity and successful life course transitions, whereas goals such as independence and autonomy have been seen as inconsistent with the achievement of a complete feminine biography. The implication is that women would not willingly choose to remain unmarried, and this supposition in turn contributes to 'cultural images of the unmarried woman as desperate and flawed' (Sandfield & Percy).

According to Sharp & Ganong, (2011) since successfully performing femininity according to dominant cultural norms means having a sexual connection to a man, single women confront the knowledge that their identities are 'tainted' by their single status.

Similarly Byrne and Carr (2005) argued that research conducted over the past twenty years showed that unmarried women are viewed as less likable. To summarize, when an unmarried woman is seen as less likeable, it means many people in her society are likely feel sorry for her because she seems not to do what everyone does.

2.10. Coping Mechanism of unmarried women

According to Bayrne, (2000) those whose social identities are perceived as not supporting the dominant norms of society are more likely to be aware of their sense of self (precisely because their identities are objects for public scrutiny and inquiry). Only those who are affected by the consequences of stigmatized social interaction. Individuals can distance themselves from the social identity concerned, the salience of the stigmatized social identity can be refuted, individual can seek to change the stereotypical representations which make up the stigmatized social identity, they can seek a social identity which supports approved norms or they can compose a self-identity with which they are secure and which fits with their values and choices.

Single women have learned to be not only highly situation conscious but also are also adept in managing social relationships. Women routinely invent excuses not to attend coupled factions. Some women learn to avoid being discredited in work and social settings by concealing personal information about themselves and by keeping their private life and work life separate. Others deliberately mislead, pretend to be married, partnered or engaged drawing attention away from their continuing singleness. Some women invited a boyfriend or persuaded a friend to pose as their fiancée to deter queries about their marital intentions from ever- anxious neighbors and relatives. Other women wore engagement rings. Beings alone in settings are often occasions when women have to deal with unwanted sexual attentions of predatory men by mentioning that they had a boyfriend, partner or spouse. These strategies indicate that single women have learned to cope with, prepare for and respond to a stigmatized social identity. The protective strategies deter further inquiry and stigmatization. Stigma effectively works to elicit support for dominant beliefs, practice and values, while controlling those who, for whatever reason, choose to do otherwise (Bayrne, 2000).

Women have a list of stories to explain their singleness to others which reduce the consequences of stigma in interaction. These stories are understood as responses to learning that one is a

member of a stigmatized social category, that one has to cope with, prepare for and respond to the presence of a stigmatized social identity. Women's singleness has always to be explained and single women are adept at providing a variety of accounts to others of why they are single. The veracity of the account depends on the situation, who is asking the question, the sincerity of the inquiry and the general mood of the woman herself. Depending on the context, women could advance several explanations at any one time or vary the explanation used from one situation to another (Bayrne, 2000).

2.11. Reasons for Remaining Single

According to Wikipedia people may remain single for a variety of reasons, including financial and emotional or physical health issues, stress in family, time constraints, education, career, personal preferences, single people may be uninterested in marriage, domestic partnership, or other types of committed relationships

Studies show that the reasons for remaining single for women were not simple matters. The process may consist of a series of events and transition during childhood and young adulthood that cut across several life courses. Some combination of events related to family, friends, education, work and residence interacted to limit their opportunity or desire to marry.(Allen, 1989)

2.11.1. High level of Education

Research has shown that educational attainment prolongs time of marriage among women. Mensch, Grant, and Blanc (2005) showed that increased educational attainment is a possible factor in delaying women's age at first marriage. This implies the higher women's educational attainment the lower their chances of marrying early. The longer the years of schooling, the later the likelihood of marriage. Education leads young women to have greater influences over the timing of marriage and choice of marriage partners. This can be said so because educational attainment seems to keep most women in the schooling system for some number of years than their counterpart who are not schooling thus ready to be married after puberty. Thus as the girl stays in school, she will finish her education before marrying.

Similarly Lloyd and Mensch (1999) argued that a girl's exposure to education helps to broaden the girl's perspective on the world, increasing her aspirations which can include wanting to have a greater influence on choice of her husband.

Well educated women are more likely to remain single than less educated women. In Asia Women with university education are twice more likely to be never married than those with primary education or less. In Indonesia a woman who has completed tertiary education, has a good job or career, and is 27 years old or older will be considered too old and undesirable. Indonesian men's preference for young wives is connected to their preference for productive (childbearing), quiet, passive, and submissive wives whom they can control (Retnaningsih, 2012).

According to Pereira (2014) young women in Palestine dismissed their own chance as high school graduate for a suitable marriage in contrast to that women perceived post-secondary education to be a marriage asset if coupled with secure employment. Young women with less education, particularly young women who finished high school education and remained at home, found themselves with diminishing marriage prospects.

Ethiopian health and demographic survey report indicated that women with no education marry 7.7 years earlier than women with more than secondary education which is 16.3 years versus 24.0 years (CSA, 2016)

In addition research also shows that women who have finished their education, have better jobs and become highly successful appear to scare men away from them because most men feel intimidated as a result of their success. A research conducted by Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe (2011) in Nigeria revealed that women with high educational status and higher financial standings tend not to get men to marry them because the men become intimidated by their positions. This is because such women are seen as unmarriageable, arrogant and too independent, and also too confident. In support of this argument Retnaningsih, (2000) in his study also shows that educated unmarried career women are stereotyped in Indonesia society as incompetent, demanding, or too ambitious, which results in pressures from their social environments to find a soul mate or husband.

According to Cargan & Melko (1982) an educated and career-minded single women is admired, while at the same time is an object of pity or ridicule. Society's attitude that Females are only good for cooking, cleaning, bearing children, acting feminine and being submissive Makes Intelligent, brainy, and successful women to scare men (Guest writer, 2008). (Yuarsi, 2002) argue that education cannot really improve women's position in the society because men physical power and privilege seem to be still more dominant than women's education. Hook (1994) stated that sexist thinking makes men not really desire "smart" women.

2.11.2. Establishment of a Career

Gordon (1994) argued that for a number of young men and women their busy work left them very little time for a relationship. Work plays an important part in the lives of single women. For most unmarried people career is the priority than family. Most of them would transcend once on top of the job or established in their career before settling down for marriage. Being single however is seen as a temporary phase for them before they have enough resources for a good life.

In Ethiopia there was also a new shift of expecting girls not simply to be educated but also to have an income rather than simply get married. This day's not just men but also women wanted to earn income before marriage, often by migrating. There is an emerging sense that young women should endeavor to get some economic independence and have some means of income before marrying. Girls aspire to migrate rather than get married especially if they had not done well in school. In some cities girls migrate to towns rather than marry, whereas in others they migrated to the Middle East.(Pankhurst, 2017). Being single however is seen as a temporary phase for them before they have enough resource for marriage and a good life. They prolong the years to marriage in order to make some effort on their career first to make more money in order to bare the living expense.

According to Situmorang (2007) in most countries socio-economic and industrial developments have provide new opportunities to individuals, including women to enroll at higher level of education and enter wage employment outside the home. The rising educational attainment gives greater chances for a woman to engage in formal work. This undermines the dependency of a

woman on the family for economic survival as well as social security, which in turn lowers the motivation of women to marry to gain financial security.

2.11.3. Decreases the Availability of Potential Suitors

McLaughlin, Kephart and Landry (1992) argued that women's marital timing is directly linked to the availability of men on similar age, race and economic circumstances. They concluded that mate unavailability in local marriage markets is a significant factor contributing to being single among women. This implies that many women will either want to marry people that are either in the same age range with them or people who are older than them or someone in the same ethnic group. So when a woman is of age and most of the men coming her way are far younger than her, she will not want to marry them. Besides, many people would like to marry people from similar background so when they do not get what they want, they tend to remain unmarried. To support this argument, Rayle and Bratter (2004) revealed that women are least willing to marry men who cannot hold a steady job, who are of a different race, or who are younger by five or more years but are most willing to marry men with more education and higher earnings.

Again the unavailability of quality marriage partner can also be a factor just like searching for jobs. The search for a romantic partner involves trying to get information about a partner in terms of opportunities and accepting the best taking into account the searcher's qualification and attractiveness. In a marriage market which is favorable, an individual is likely to attract a high quality partner thus lower his or her search for a partner of her standard. However, when a woman fails to get the quality of a partner she wants this may extend her time in searching for quality partner. Generally the population of women is more than that of men in many countries and when it comes to marriage not all men are marriageable, not all men have the means to marry thus leading to decrease proportion of committed men who are ready to marry leading to delay in many women's marriage (Harnett, 2008).

At this point women are aware of the downing numbers of eligible men in their society circle. They believed that they had more options and meeting men was easier when they were in their early and mid 20s. Additionally, they realized that the pool of eligible men now comprised growing numbers of divorced men with children, so women at this point convince to settle down for less than they deserve (Bayrne, 2000).

2.11.4. Idealized image of marriage

Kalmijn (1998) argued that idealized image of marriage and suitable marriage partner and unwillingness to accept compromise as a strategy for forming relationship is a reason for singlehood. Berend (2000) showed that in the nineteenth century in new England, older never married women were those who were less willing to compromise their values on marriage and family life. Both single and married women take the ideas of marriage and love seriously, and they consider a happy marriage as the happiest condition of human life, and would rather have the best or none. Similarly Siegel (1995) argued that marriage and unwillingness to accept compromise are found to be reasons for increasing number of single never married mothers. There is an increase number of older never married women in countries such as Egypt, USA, Poland, Germany, and India, where highly educated women do not want to lower their standard for an ideal marriage mate, just to marry. This shows that manly highly educated women have certain images about marriage thus they do not want to accept anything that falls short of their idealized image of marriage. Many women would not want to lower certain image that they have of marriage. So in case men come their way and they think they will not do things to meet their idealized image, they will not accept them to marry.

This is a positive sign that many women are no more settling for any man at all when it comes to lowering their standard for being just married. Rather they are trying to settle for what they truly want.

2.11.5. Being Emotionally Independent

In response to queries about their singleness, women speak about their attachment to their independence, their freedom and not wanting to be constrained by marital, intimate relationships. In this context, independence is most usually contra posed to marriage/partner relationships, prioritizing the importance of individual, emotional freedom over other types of freedoms, such as economic or political independence. Emotional independence and marital type ties are presented as an either/or situation—one at the cost of another. Marriage is equated with dependency and having to submit oneself to the authority of the husband/partner. Being ‘tied down’, ‘held back’ or ‘not one’s own boss’ are all to be avoided. Women speak about their lack of interest in or commitment to, investing time and energy in one to one, personal relationships.

Men are perceived and presented as not liking independent women: hence the explanation for women's continuing singleness. This explanation is better understood as an answer to the question 'why I am single' rather than an answer to 'why I am not married'. Singleness as a preferred option and placing a significant value on independence is stressed (Bayrne, 2000).

According Dalton (1992) Independence and freedom in decision making and with regards to social activities were cited benefits of being single. Single women particularly liked making decisions without having to consider someone else's opinion. Being single is also thought to enable people to become more self-reliant and do things on their own.

2.11.6. Failed Relations

According to Bayrne, (2000) almost all of the women who took part in his study had a story about a man in the past whom they might have married, were on the point of marrying, were engaged to or were involved with for a considerable period of time. But as the explanation reveals, the relationship ended, but the woman herself is not to blame. The man either left abruptly when the engagement/marriage plans became public, or the woman's family strongly disapproved of the woman's partner, or the man is discovered to be violent, mentally - ill, alcoholic, already married or engaged to another women. The experience of the broken romance left many women doubtful about involving themselves in future relationships, angry at the investment of time in a relationship that had no future and the lengthy time period occupied with recovering from a broken romance. On the other hand, women themselves also ended relationships, broke engagements, knowing that this is not the right person and that they are not really prepared to marry after all. The broken romance explanation again can be interpreted as stigma management and part of an identity account. As a stigma management strategy, it informs others that the woman is heterosexual, that she has attempted to form a partnership with another and that she is presenting herself as an adult, pursuing adult - type Relationships. The fact that the attempt has failed has little relevance to others, but could be interpreted as crucial to negotiating the maintenance of single self - identities in a stigmatized setting.

2.11.7. Incapable of Forming Long Term Relationships

Another explanation offered for singleness includes lack of interest in or little talent for pursuing a sexual partner. Women speak about their personalities, personal preferences, socializing patterns in the past and assume that the reason for their singleness could be found in their internal makeup. They blame themselves for being single. Women speak about their lack of capacity or ability to enter and sustain long - term relationships, casting self doubt on their maturity and adult status. Women say that they know now that they lack the ability to be sexually close to others for a long period, an aspect of themselves they say which is painful to present for scrutiny. Women say they are wary of forming new attachments, because of previous broken relationships, hence their continuing singleness. This explanation can also be interpreted both as a stigma management strategy in terms of easing social interaction but it is also a potent identity account in the context of composing a self identity. It appears to be a risky explanation as it presents the self as deficient but it can evoke reassurance and validation for other personal attributes and achievements from those that hear the account. Women explain that once a relationship starts to demand a greater commitment from them like agreeing to spend more time with a partner, agreeing to give up other activities, agreeing to sexual intimacy they start to withdraw from the relationship (Bayrne, 2000).

2.11.8. Family Background

Family background is also a contributing factor. For instance, seeing marriages of relatives such as parents, guardians and other close relatives, in terms domestic violence, divorce, and separation can be used as yardsticks to one's marriage. Daughter who observe unhappy and conflictual parent's marriage, many have a negative desire and perception about marriage in a way prolong marital delay and lead to permanent voluntary or involuntary singlehood. A research found out those females rose in one parent family, whether it is the father or mother; tend to remain single probably due to greater family responsibilities and recognition of the advantage of singlehood. So family background in terms of good or bad marital relation between parents can inspire children to marry or not to marry. This is because when children see their parents regularly quarrel without showing any love towards each other, children grow up to see

marriage as a means of quarrelling, fighting, conflict and so on. This demotivate children specially girls to decide not to marry in future (Pan, 2004)

According, Bayrne, (2000) Women consider whether traumatic familial events are possible, personal explanations for remaining single and speak about having to live with alcoholic parents/siblings; witnessing poor marital relationships of parents/relatives; being separated from parents or having to assume adult responsibilities at an early age. Women speak about wanting to live a life that was not their mother's, having grown - up in a household with many other siblings whose parents constantly quarreled, whose mother was utterly dependent on her husband for food, clothing and shelter which on occasion were withheld

2.11.9. High Cost of Marriage and Urbanization

Singh and Samara (1996) in Mensch,et al. (2005) indicated that urbanization is associated with late marriages because of the nature of urban life. To them, women in urban areas are exposed to modern values and they are also less likely to be under the influence of kin who control the timing of marriage and choice of spouse; thus urbanization encourages later marriage. Thus, when one compares women in rural settlements and urban areas, one can say that those who live in urban areas are exposed to so many things like modernization, education and other modern lifestyles. These are predominant factors of urban life thus women in cities tend to enjoy urban lifestyle therefore encouraging late marriages. Besides, as people stay in cities, they are less likely to be influenced by relatives who will put pressure on them to marry and who to marry and at what time.

Furthermore, the cost of marriage coupled with expensive dowry is also another factor to stay unmarried. It is also known that the cost of marriage has escalated in a wide range of settings. A research conducted by Sajeda and Bajracharya (2011:4) showed that “in many parts of the world, the costs of marriage are drivers of social change. Even while practices are widely varied, the consequences for women are overwhelmingly negative.” They argued further that traditional courtship that involved a large bride price was viewed as a burden for young men. It is known that the cost of wedding is becoming very expensive scaring most potential men around to be committed in long lasting relationships leading to late marriages among many grown up women. This prohibitively high bride price demanded by parents in some rural areas of Ethiopia is

encouraging poor young men to abduct and rape underage girls in order to secure a marriage (Teshome, 2002, cited in Guday,2005)

According to Pankhurst (2017) economic constraints on couples setting up an independent livelihood is another factor in Ethiopia for delaying marriage. This is often because since men could not establish themselves they would delay marriage in order to save money leading to women receiving marriage proposal later. Increasing living cost, unemployment and lack of jobs resulting men being dependent on their families and unable to marry.

2.11.10. Something That Just Happens

According to Bayrne,(2000) being single by chance rather than choice or personal characteristics is also mentioned as an explanation. Fate takes over and destiny determines whether one is single or not. Women say that they have not really thought about why they are single, it ‘just happened’ this way. Women citing this explanation feel that they, unlike others, have little control over the development, shape and future of their lives. They do not perceive or position themselves as active agents, shaping and deciding on their futures or life plans, but are the casualties of a ‘mapped’ life, a life not selected for themselves.

Such women acknowledge that other single women may choose to embrace the single lifestyle, but emphasize that they are not part of that category. ‘Not choosing’ singleness eases social interaction and demonstrates women’s distance from the stigmatized social identity. While ‘something that just happens’ can be interpreted as adopting a fatalistic stance, arguably, it could also be interpreted as an attempt to move away from a failed identity and to build a new self - identity that is not based on marital status (Bayrne,2000).

2.11.11. Being Needed by Others/Caring for Others

One reason for being single as a consequence of caring for elderly parents for a long number of years is a commonly used explanation, as many single women have had caring responsibilities. As noted above, being single can identify a woman in a family as the most likely candidate to care for Parents/relatives and single women speak of their obligation and willingness to care. One woman equates her mother’s need for her care and protection and her own unquestioning fulfillment of that need as being similar to ‘...a family situation, of being married, that I was

needed, I was part of that'. But a history of caring is also cited as the reason why women are currently single. Women say that they had no choice but to remain single during the care period, explaining that caring reduced their chances to meet potential partners as leisure time and opportunities for socializing were limited. Caring identities and single identities are interwoven. It is clear that caring is a labor intensive and relationship exclusive activity. Being an active care giver is also presented as a deterrent to any man who might be interested in a relationship. Women in long - term caring situations comment that they could not choose between caring for a Parent and a partner and they would not expect a man to share a home with them while they were caring for an elderly dependent (Bayrne,2000).

2.12. Fear of Unmarried Women

Being acutely aware of the changing reality at their age is mentioned as the biggest fear of unmarried women this include, Acknowledging that the pool of eligible men is changing, Women were cognizant of the dwindling numbers of eligible men in their social circles. They believed that they had more options and meeting men was easier when they were in their early and mid-20s. Additionally, they realized that the pool of eligible men now comprised growing numbers of divorced men and men with children. One woman explained the situation saying. Over time, in response to the pool of eligible men, it makes women more willing to date younger men and men who were divorced and had children. Another fear of unmarried women is watching more friends and coworkers marry, they observed an increasing number of friends and others around them marrying and some women might be the only single person at work and, therefore, experienced heightened visibility of their single status. Acknowledging risks and concerns accompanying later childbearing is another fear of older unmarried women, Women were aware of their increasing risk of infertility as they aged. Since most women preferred to have children within a marriage, they had not yet had children. They were vigilant with birth control and they are afraid that their eggs were dying slowly. In addition, they were concerned about genetic complications associated with having children at older ages. Another concern was being an older parent; they worried about having reduced energy, and they are also worried about the increasing age gap between their future children and themselves with each year that passed (Sharp & Ganong, 2011).

Being vulnerable is another fear of unmarried woman and this social and economic vulnerability apply particularly if there is no adult of opposite sex within the household, namely no substitute male figure in form of an adult son. When looked at the border context of women's status in society, the position of single women without independent resource lies at the least favored, most vulnerable end (Pankhurst H, 1990)

2.13. Theoretical frame work

A theoretical framework serves as a sort of lens through which a phenomenon is viewed (Terre Blanch & Durrheim, 1999). In this chapter, the researcher present two prominent theories, the first theory singlism used to show the negative perception, stigmatization, and discrimination unmarried women face, while the second theory, social constructivism used to show how dominant believes about marriage and singlehood in the society influence people's perceptions about themselves.

Singlism

A major theory that has been used to study marriage and singleness is singlism. The theory was used by Morris and Depaulo (2005) to study singles and their place in society and science. They arrive at the conclusion that singles are stigmatized. Singlism is unchallenged and unquestioned set of beliefs, ideology of marriage and family. Its premises include the assumption that the sexual partnership is the one truly important peer relationship and that people who have such partnership are happier and more fulfilled than those who do not. As a result of ideology of marriage and family adult unmarried women face many negative perceptions, stigmatization, and discrimination. This theory was used by Depaulo and Morris to study how marriage is valued so highly that people who seem to be unmarried are perceived negatively. They provide evidence of negative perceptions about unmarried women such as, singlehood is a stigmatized identity, singles are perceived as even more socially immature and maladjusted than married women , and singles were also consistently viewed as more self centered and envious than married women.

Ever since the theory has been documented it has been applied by different researchers for instance, Day, Kay, Holmes, and Napier (2011) have applied this theory to show that discrimination practices against singles have some root in system justifying needs. Besides,

Sharp & Ganong (2011) used the theory and evidenced from their work showed that single women face pressure from co-workers, relatives and friends to marry and this strengthening the idea that women who remain unmarried or single are seen as deviants.

According to singlism theory Depaulo and Morris evidenced that the level of stigma attached to singles are varied based on sexism and ageism. Single women face much more stigmatization than single men plus older single women are highly stigmatized than the younger one.

Though singlism is discovered and discussed in U.S.A where there is a huge cultural Difference from Ethiopia. Ethiopian as a nation cherish marriage highly and this can be evidenced by early marriage still persist in the country even if it is an illegal and punishable act by the law for a woman to enter in to marriage before 18 years studies by (Gudaye, 2005 Damte,2010, Amsalu, 2007) show still early marriage persist in the country. This shows that women are expected to marry as early as possible. So when a woman decided not to marry or stay single at a marriageable age or past the expectant age she will draw negative attention to her and her actions will be highly securitize by people around her. Discriminatory and stigmatized actions will be held by the society towards her because she is considered as a threat to the society and to the institution of marriage. She might be excluded and not be invited to social gatherings and if she is invited she might not want to go because she knows that people will gossip about her. So in a society where women are expected to marry as early as possible it is really hard to be past thirty and stay unwed.

The social constructivism theory

Though Singlism shows that unmarried women are highly stigmatized and discriminated due to their marital status because other people hold negative perception towards unmarried women, Social constructivism theory on the other hand discussed that unmarried woman internalize and accept this negative perceptions hold by others towards them as true.

Social construction theorists argue that knowledge is derived and maintained through social interactions. They posit that meaning is created through countless interactions with the environment. Even the most basic, taken for granted, common sense understanding of reality are the product of our interaction and conversation with others (Berger & Lukman, 1966). Social constructs are not inherent but rather dependent or contingent upon variables of our social selves.

Knowledge is not fixed entity but an evolving process that occurs through the interactions that take place with others (Hoffman, 1990). Aniciete and Soloski(2011) noted that “ Dominant beliefs within society, and also ourselves, influence each individual’s perception of what is real” (p. 104). The concept of marriage is still an institution that perpetuates the stigmatization of single women. Research indicates that certain dominant beliefs regarding women who remain single past the expectant marital age hold a negative connotation that women internalize and adopt as truth (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). This negative reality cultivates the inequality that strengthens the stereotypical beliefs surrounding single women.

Marriage has come a long way from its once arranged contractual nature at this time families would come together and discussed assets to see what potential benefits would result from a particular union. Often feelings of love and devotion developed after a marriage was established but having these feelings as driving factors of motivation to initially enter in the institution was never a consideration. Throughout history people have always fall in love but rarely were the emotion a considerable factor in the construction of a matrimones union. During the eighteenth century, people began to adopt a new approach to marriage. This new approach put love as a fundamental reason for marriage and gave individuals free region to choose their partners based on a romantic affection. During this period in history the institution of marriage was undergoing a reconstruction, revealing a new marriage system where love conquered all. Even though the reason to marry had changed the symbolic nature of the union had not due to that single individuals are consistently stigmatized. For women specifically marriage is destiny. Women are born and bred to fulfill certain domestic roles. However this notion is not inherent rather it is an idea that has been established as a dominant ideology through that adoption of tradition social constructs (charlin, 2010; Coontz, 2005).

A contributing factor associated with the deinstitutionalization of marriage is economic transformation. As society increasingly becomes an individualistic entity and women continue to surpass men in career advancement and educational achievement, more women are entering in to marriage as established, educated, equal partners (Coontz, 2005)

Even though current trends favor individualization and personal achievements, dominant societal constructs brand single women as inferior and incomplete. A woman is not simply born a woman

through her embodied situation within the world. Getting married puts women in the embodied situation deemed necessary by socially constructed standards (Reynolds & Wetherell 2011)

Social constructionist theorists posit that the socially constructed world must be continually negotiated by the individual in order for the individual to remain part of it. Women negotiate and justify their existence by gaining a title (wife) that ties them to a man in order to avoid being classified as other (Sharp & Ganong, 2011)

The individual is given by his/her society certain decisive cornerstones for his/her everyday experience and conduct. These cornerstones are what define women. They are part of the constructed life order. The ordering begins and is formed in the individual from the earliest stages of socialization, then keeps on being enlarged and modified by the individuals throughout their lives. This order is not chosen by women rather it is discovered externally through countless interactions with others (Sharp & Gangon, 2011)

Because women are always defined and differentiated in reference to another, single women who do not follow the constructed order are left without an identity and therefore are given the collective stigmatized identity of spinster. Women who remain single are often seen as incomplete. Their existence is thought of as transitional, a waiting period before they enter into a marriage and ultimately become complete (Sharp & Gangon, 2011)

Discrimination and stigmatization towards single women may indeed contribute even more to the negative consequences of being single, than the mere fact that they are single (Simon, 2002). Single people might perceive the negative attitudes towards them and incorporate these into their own self-evaluations (Byrne & Carr, 2005). According to the social constructivism theory dominant beliefs within society, influence each individual's perception of what is real and certain dominant beliefs regarding women who remain single past the expectant marital age hold a negative connection that women internalize and adopt as truth. Hence the researcher use this theory to show how women feels about being unmarried past the expectant marital age and how these dominant beliefs about marriage and singlehood influence unmarried women's feeling towards themselves.

CHAPTER THREE

Research methodology

This section of the thesis describes the methods used, subjects included in the study, the instruments and procedures used for data collection, and the techniques employed for data analysis. In order to undertake this phenomenological research the researcher applied a qualitative research method. Bryan (2008) defines qualitative research method as a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analyses of data.

Qualitative research has been described as a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live. It refers to a study process that investigates a problem where the researcher conducts the study in a natural setting and builds a complex analysis in a natural setting by which of rich description and explanation, as well as a careful examination of data. The aim of this research methodology is to investigate the meaning of social phenomena as experienced by the people themselves (Kearney, 2001).

Qualitative research looks for a deep understanding of the particular. Kvale and Maxwell (1996) noted that qualitative research has more advantages in finding rather sensitive social issues like awareness, experience, individual behaviors, and social situations to answer the question why and how these behaviors and actions happen.

Phenomenological qualitative research is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of individual. Epistemologically phenomenological approaches are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and emphasize the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. Phenomenological qualitative research aims to uncover the meaning of individual's experience of a specified phenomenon. It pays respectful attention to a person's direct experience, and encourages research participants to tell their own story in their own words (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). For this reason the researcher found it appropriate to use this method in order to discover women's experiences of being unmarried at late age.

3.1 Data Source

In order to undertake this research the researcher used primary and secondary data sources. The primary data was collected using semi-structured in-depth interview and FGD. Beside primary data, published and unpublished materials like books, reports, journals, and articles, was reviewed. Any written material on the subject was valuable asset for the study in order to identifying the research gap in existing literature and to broaden my understanding on the subject that is going to be investigated. To this end the researcher reviewed several literatures on lived experience of unmarried women

3.2 Instruments of data collection

Two types of data collection instruments were developed to collect data. These include semi-structured in-depth interview and Focus group discussions. The questions were originally prepared in English language (Appendix I) and then translated in to Amharic (the local language) for easy understanding by the interviewer and the respondents.

The questions were pre-tested among some respondents before the actual data collection was conducted, to make sure that the questions were clear and could be understood by the respondents. As soon as pre-testing of the questions was completed the questions were rearranged based on the feedback that was obtained from the respondents.

3.2.1 Semi-structured interview

Although various data collection techniques are used in qualitative research, interviews, and more specifically face-to-face semi- structured interviews, are commonly used by feminist researchers. Even though personal interviews are labor intensive, they are the best way of collecting high quality data. Interviews capture the multitude of subjective views of a theme so that the researcher comes to see the respondents' complex social world (Wambui, 2013).

According to kumar (2005) Interview data is an appropriate inter- subjective way for participants and researchers to exchange meanings and interpretations of particular events or actions.

Interviews generally have been described as very useful when they are applied to the exploration of more complex and subtle phenomena. It is a more suitable method of data collection when a

researcher needs to gain insight into things like opinions, feelings, emotions, and experiences (Denscombe, 2007).

Semi-structured interview model was applied to find answers for this research. According to Kvale & Brubaker (2009). Semi-structured interview attempts to understand themes of the lived everyday world from the subjects own perspective. These kinds of interview seek to obtain description of the interview's lived world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena. Semi-structured interview offers wide access to the informant's experiences and opinions with flexibility

3.2.2 In -depth interview

In-depth interviews are one of the most common qualitative methods. In-depth interview offer the opportunity to the interviewee to express themselves in a way ordinary life rarely affords them. Many people find it flattering and even cathartic to discuss their opinions and life experiences and to have someone listen with interest. Interviewers engaged in in-depth interview are offered the privilege of having people who are virtually strangers entrust them with a glimpse into their personal lives (Wright, 1996).

In-depth interview is a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participants' perspective on the research topic. During in-depth interviews, the person being interviewed is considered the expert and the interviewer is considered the student. The researcher's interviewing techniques are motivated by the desire to learn everything the participant can share about the research topic. Researchers engage with participants by posing questions in a natural manner, listening attentively to participant's response, and asking follow-up questions and probes based on those responses. Researchers do not lead participants according to any preconceived notions, nor do they encourage participants to provide particular answers by expressing approval or disapproval of what they say (Wright, 1996).

In-depth interview is optimal for collecting data about individuals; personal, histories, perspective, and experience (Brayen, 2008). Due to this reason the researcher found it appropriate to use this method in order to explore the lived experience of unmarried women.

The researcher conducted in-depth interview with 16 unmarried women who have different educational background, financial status, religion, ethnic and age group and who are currently living in Addis Ababa city as a main data gathering technique and it allows researcher to explore women's subjective experiences and the meaning that they attach to those experiences.

3.2.3 Focus Group Discussion

Focus groups are group interviews that give the researcher the ability to capture deeper information about the topic that is under investigation. Group interactions between members of the target group population during focus group may encourage participants to make connections to various concepts through the discussions that may not occur during individual interviews (Nagle and Williams, 2008) Focus group discussions avoid focusing on the individual devoid of social context, or separate from interactions with others. They are relatively non-hierarchical method they shift the balance of power away from the researcher towards the research participants. They have a potential to help women to collectively change their consciousness by fostering collective identities and solidarities. Group interviews are said to facilitate such connections because they can go beyond uncovering already existing meanings produced by already constituted subjectivities, they can bring into being new meanings and new subjectivities in this way participants gain access to new information, new ways of thinking to the sense that they a sense of emancipation (Wambui, 2013).

Group interviews in phenomenological research are beneficial because they stimulate discussion and brought up new perspectives. They provide insights into how people think and provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied (Jones, Sambrook, and, Irvine, 2008).

Non verbal communication is also a data that can be captured in focus group. Participants within a focus group may respond very differently to a topic. It also allows participants to hear the ideas of others, which help them to formulate their own opinions. Also participants are able to elaborate their views in response to encouragement or defend them when challenged by other group members.(Nagle and Williams, 2008).

In this study the researcher organized one focus group which contains a population of 8 members who have similar educational background all are degree holders and have nearly comparable financial status but from different religion and ethnic group. According to kruger and Casey

(2000) groups consisting of less than five participants often experience difficulty generating adequate conversation, and more than ten participants in one group can make it difficult for the facilitator to control the group. Large groups also make it difficult for every participant to have the opportunity to speak.

3.3. Sampling Techniques

In order to undertake this research the researcher employed snowball sampling technique which is a non probability form of sampling technique used to identify potential subjects in studies where subjects are hard to locate. It is a popular technique among social scientists who wish to work with a popular location that is difficult to identify or locate. Researcher begins with a small population of known individuals whom he/she know and expands the sample by asking those initial participants to identify others that should participate in the study. In other words the sample starts small but “snowballs” into a large sample through the course of the research. 24 participants were selected using snow ball sampling and among the whole population eight participants were used in focus group discussion based on their willingness to participate in a group discussion and share their experience and stories with total strangers while the rest of population were used in in-depth interview. The participants were never married women above the age of 30 who are currently residing in Addis Ababa and the researcher tried to find a diverse population of women such as women from different social, economic, education and religious background in order to make the research population a more representative of women of different groups. The youngest participants were found in their 30’s while the oldest was in her 50’s.

Demographic Information of Participants

Table 1 Below is the summary of demographic information of participants

NAME	AGE	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	RELIGION	ETHNICITY
AM	37	HIGH SCHOOL	BUSINESS	ORTHODOX	AMHARA
AN	30	FIRIST DEGREE	CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFICER	ORTHODOX	OROMO
AS	35	>> >>	>> >>	PROTESTANT	TIGRAY
ES	32	FIRIST DEGREE	>> >>	ORTHODOX	AMHARA
FR	38	>> >>	NURS	ORTHODOX	>> >>
GZ	43	>> >>	ACCOUNTANT	>> >>	>> >>
HW	32	>> >>	CHEMIST	>> >>	>> >>
KS	38	DIPLOMA	TABLE MASTER	>> >>	OROMO
MA	31	FIRIST DEGREE	CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFICER	>> >>	>> >>
MD	30	DEGREE	BUSINESS	MUSLIM	TIGRAY
MZ	35	HIGH SCHOOL	CLEANER	ORTHODOX	AMHARA
NT	39	MA DEGREE	FINANCE HEAD	>> >>	AMHARA
QN	32	DEGREE	CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFICER	>> >>	>> >>
RC	37	DIPLOMA	SECREATRY	PROTESTANT	OROMO
SB	39	PRIMARY EDUCATION	HOUSE WIFE	ORTHODOX	GURAGE
SH	47	>> >>	>> >>	>> >>	AMHARA
SR	45	>> >>	OPERATOR	>> >>	>> >>
SY	50	FIRIST DEGREE	MANAGER	>> >>	TIGRAY
TG	44	PRIMARY EDUCATION	BUSINESS	>> >>	>> >>
TN	35	FIRIST DEGREE	MARKETING	PROTESTANT	OROMO
TS	34	DIPLOMA	MESSENGER	ORTHODOX	AMHARA
UR	32	MA DEGREE	LAWYER	PROTESTANT	>> >>
YO	36	FIRIST DIGREE	TEACHER	ORTHODOX	GURAGE
YR	30	FIRST DEGREE	ACCOUNTANT	ORTHODOX	TIGRAY

3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis described as the process of breaking down the information collected to identify patterns and themes that exist within the dataset. Qualitative data analysis is the process in which the researcher moves from the raw data that have been collected as part of the research study and use it to provide explanations, understanding and interpretation of the phenomena, people and situation which we are studying (Keyton, 2011).

The aim of analyzing qualitative data is to examine the meaningful and symbolic content of that which is found within. The researcher aim for is to try to identify and understand such concepts, situations and ideas as a person's interpretation of the world/ situation in which they find themselves at any given moment, how they come to have that point of view of their situation or environment in which they find themselves, how they relate to others within their world, how they cope within their world, their own view of their history and the history of others who share their own experiences and situation, how they identify and see themselves and others who share their own experiences and situations. (Flick, 2017).

Phenomenological data analysis involves such processes as coding (open, axial, and selective), categorizing and making sense of the essential meanings of the phenomenon. Coding referes to the process of going through the data' with a fine toothcomb' looking for themes, ideas and categories and then noting similar parts in the text and giving them a 'code label'. This means that later the researcher can find them again in order to make comparisons between passages in the text so that the researcher can analyze what is happening. From this researcher make comparisons between categories and ideas. The codes that researcher use are based on certain topics that the researcher identify as being relevance to the study, they can be based on ideas, concepts, terms or phrases (Fade,2004)

The information (data) gathered from in-depth interview and Focus group discussion transcribed in to Amharic and translated in English language, after those themes were identified. Then major issues within in each theme were further reduced and revisited while checking the consistency of each of the ideas that arose during the field work. Similar ideas were clustered and different ideas were further checked on the spot in the field. The core issues pertinent to the objectives were separated.

During the first phase of analysis the researcher used open coding in order to reduce the data to a small set of themes that appear to describe the phenomenon that is under investigation. During open coding the data that have been collected divided into segments and then they scrutinized for commonalities that could reflect categories or themes. Once they are categorized, then they examined for properties that characterize each category. Once the phase of open coding complete the process of axial coding begin this phase that allow the researcher to link the phases that emerge during open coding phase together and apply them to see what categories begin to emerge. The researcher took the phases retrieved during the open coding phase and links them together in a meaningful way. Connections are made amongst the categories and the subcategories. This involves putting data to in new ways by making connections between the categories. This achieved by exploring conditions, context, action/ interactional strategies and consequences which influence the phenomena that are being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Lastly the data were selectively coded to establish interrelationship among the categories that will be emerged during the axial coding process. During this process the categories and their interrelationship are combined to form a ‘storyline’ that describes what happens in the phenomenon that is being studied. Fake names that are shortened to the first alphabet of the names of respondents were used in analyzing the data in order to keep the privacy of the participants

3.5. Ethical consideration

The researcher is very much aware of the big responsibility to be sensitive and respectful of research participants and their basic human rights. At the beginning of the interview and the discussion the researcher explained the purpose of the research to respondents and got their verbal consent before conducting the interview and the discussion. The researcher also insured respondents the information they give would be kept confidential as the analysis is made without mentioning their real names and also they are informed participating is voluntary and for some reason if they want to withdraw from it they have the right to voluntary do at any time or they can skip any question that they would not wish to answer.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of the study and discusses them mainly in line with the research objectives.

As a researcher I was amazed at the willingness and openness the women displayed as they share their experiences and feelings associated with their single status. The women open up and shared how they negotiate their status as a single woman in their everyday interactions with family, friends, co-workers and other general acquaintances.

Analyzing the lived experience of single women led to interesting findings regarding certain ideas women connected with their single status. From the data gathered four themes were identified: 1) reasons to be single; 2) unmarried women's feeling about their marital status; 3) positive and negative aspects of being single; and 4) coping mechanism of single women

The first theme reason to be single composed of the categories that addressed, not finding the right person for marriage, education and career goals, financial and social status, broken promises, witnessing failed relation of others, being scared of responsibility and living in the city. The second theme unmarried women's feelings about their single status consisted the categories that addressed frustration, less connected with friends, loneliness, envy, miss judged, concerns of late child bearing, failure, exhaustion, less beautiful, less respected and missing something. The third theme included categories that expressed positive and negative aspects of being single. It consisted ideas of freedom, leisure time and opportunities, and experiencing unsolicited advice and comments. The fourth and the final theme emerged from categories that illustrate women's coping mechanism with their internal desire to marry and their family, friends and others pressure to marry off them.

4.1. Reasons to be single

Previous studies in Western societies suggested that the reasons for remaining single for women were not simple matters (Gordon 1994; Allen 1989). The process may consist of a series of events and transitions during childhood and young adulthood that cut across several life course

careers (Allen 1989). Some combinations of events related to family, friends, education, work and residence, interacted to limit their opportunity or desire to marry.

For most of my participants, being single wasn't a choice; they saw it as a journey upon which life had taken them or a path decided for them by a higher power. Many respondents referenced the evolution of their decision and indicated the ability to be able to "go with the flow" and accept this fact. Many of the respondents did not expect this status to be a permanent, stable state of being.

The reasons to be single given by women who participated in this study include, not finding the right person for marriage, unsuccessful relations/broken promises, financial and social status, education and career, being scared of the responsibility, seeing failed relations. And the most common answer that was given by participants was not to be able to find the right person for marriage. None of them said they had chosen to be single. All women in the study had had at least one serious relationship in the past that did not work.

A. Not finding the right person for marriage

Nearly every woman, participated in this study says they just haven't met the right man. The right person clearly encompasses the ideal characteristic and personality of the perfect person with whom they could consider having a relationship.

A woman who is found in her 30's, has a first degree and work as customer service officer at the bank described the right person for her as:

"I used to watch a lot of Hollywood movies in my early 20's which has a great influence on picturing my soul mate (perfect guy). I expected the guys I dated to be so modern, romantic, muscular and passionate like the ones I see on the movie and that lead me to be so picky. Now being more mature with age and thinking about it I think that was so foolish and unrealistic of me to expect the guys to have personal and physical traits of the movie characters. You know since fictional characters are only found on movies and these is a real world no such a perfect guy exist especially if we took our country context that people are struggling each day to survive it is so unfair of me to expect a guy to go to a gym and build a six pack for me."(ES, 32)

Another reason given by women not finding the right partner for life and marriage relay on the men they dated not being religious. Since religion is the main operator of individuals' life in Ethiopia women want and expect their men to be a good religious follower and to have a good connection with God. Even though it is hard to measure what good follower is, the women indicate some points on how they want their men to behave like, to go to church at least ones in a week or every Sunday, to surrender his will to God's will like to wait to have sex until marriage, not to be involved in any drug and alcohol addiction.

A participant who work as a secretary and have a diploma stated how she wants her man to be a good Christian:

"I want someone who has a strong connection with God, who make me strong and lead me to the holy path. But the ones I dated are far from these. They were not the kind of person who will surrender their will to God's will." (RC, 37)

Another participant who works as a senior accountant in a private firm point out some of her criteria's for the right man like this:

"I want him to be a good Christian, financially stable & I prefer if he can earn at least equal or more than what I make for a living. I expect him to have a degree like me, don't get me wrong but I want him to be able to understand what I am saying, to communicate with less effort and I believe education plays a huge role on that. The looks I stop expecting to get my prince charming that I used to dream when I was in high school and college, who is fit, tall with a mesmerizing smile and deep eyes and now all I want him to look is normal and healthy. I mean it will be enough if I am able to introduce him to my friends and my family without being concerned about his looks." (YR, 30)

One of the interviewee who has a first degree and work as a customer service officer dated several guys and wanted to settle down but the men were not serious enough:

"I have been dating several guys but none of them were marriage material, they couldn't meet at least 50% of the criteria I put to classify the keepers from the players. It is not that my criteria are impractical it's just the guys are so player." (MA, 31)

One informant who work in a bank and owned a first degree also stated how she is not bothered if he earns less than she does. But she doesn't think men are responsible enough to start a family:

"I don't mind if he is getting paid less than I am, I know my paycheck will be enough to cover our expenses. But (sigh) the huge problem lean on when I think if he will be able to be a father figure to our kids and provide enough love and time to his family, I don't think so. Because these days all they (men) want to do is wonder around the whole day, have a beer and a blast the whole night forgetting they have kids, wife and responsibility at home waiting for them, and came late at night expecting you to have sex with them." (AS, 35)

The above participant stated she is not bothered about his financial status and she don't mind if he is getting paid less than her while most women mind this. The only thing that worries her is if he is not going to be a good role model and a father figure for their kids and couldn't provide enough love to her. She is also worried if he is not mature enough to take the responsibilities that come with marriage.

A participant who has a bachelor degree and works in a marketing department of a private firm indicates how she wants her significant other to be romantic:

"I am the kind of person who fantasizes romance a lot. I like the idea of taken out to dinner dates with a candle light and a wine on the table and single rose on my hand. But Ethiopian men are so not like that. The reason I like the idea of romance is because I can see his effort to make me happy by doing all the romantic things which showed/assured me how he truly feel (his true affection)." (TN, 35)

Another informant who has a primary education and a house wife said she wants her significant other to be from her ethnic group (Amhara):

"I prefer if he is from my ethnic group, you know you would have so much in common if you are from the same village or ethnic group." (SH, 47)

Kalmijn (1998) argued that idealized image of marriage and suitable marriage partner and unwillingness to accept compromise as a strategy for forming relationship is a reason for

singlehood. Berend (2000) Both single and married women take the ideas of marriage and love seriously, and they consider a happy marriage as the happiest condition of human life, and would rather have the best or none. Similarly Siegel (1995) argued that marriage and unwillingness to accept compromise are found to be reasons for increasing number of single never married women. There is an increase number of older never married women in countries such as Egypt, USA, Poland, Germany, and India, where highly educated women do not want to lower their standard for an ideal marriage mate, just to marry. This shows that manly highly educated women have certain images about marriage thus they do not want to accept anything that falls short of their idealized image of marriage. Many women would not want to lower certain image that they have of marriage. So in case men come their way and they think they will not do things to meet their idealized image, they will not accept them to marry.

The above quotes show us how women are ready and want to settle down for the man they thought right, for some he's rightness is measured by his looks while for others it is by his character traits, his spirituality, his education and financial background. But not finding this right person make women to delay their marriage. Whilst most women are not ready to minimize their criteria and settle for less some women especially those who thought their timing for marriage is ended minimize and reshape their criteria for this right person. For most of the women it is due to maturation while for the others it is the fear of getting old alone that makes them to decide to settle down for less.

This finding confirms the reviewed literature. In line with Rayle and Bratter (2004) how many people would like to marry people from similar background so when they do not get what they want, they tend to remain unmarried. To support this argument, their study revealed that women are least willing to marry men who cannot hold a steady job, but are most willing to marry men with more education and higher earnings.

Harnett(2008) also stated the unavailability of quality marriage partner can be a factors to remain single. The search for a romantic partner involves trying to get information about a partner in terms of opportunities and accepting the best taking into account the searcher's qualification and attractiveness. In a marriage market which is favorable, an individual is likely to attract a high quality partner thus lower his or her search for a partner of her standard. However, when a woman fails to get the quality of a partner she wants this may extend her time

in searching for quality partner. Generally the population of women is more than that of men in many countries and when it comes to marriage not all men are marriageable, not all men have the means to marry thus leading to decrease proportion of committed men who are ready to marry leading to delay in many women's marriage (Harnett, 2008).

B. Education

Women in my study also talked about how their busy work left them very little time for a relationship. And how they want to achieve certain educational goals and exceed in their career before getting married.

Research has shown that educational attainment prolongs time of marriage among women. Mensch, Grant, and Blanc (2005) showed that increased educational attainment is a possible factor in delaying women's age at first marriage. This implies the higher women's educational attainment the lower their chances of marrying early. The longer the years of schooling, the later the woman will get married. Education leads young women to have greater influences over the timing of marriage and choice of marriage partners. This can be said so because educational attainment seems to keep most women in the schooling system for some number of years than their counterpart who are not schooling thus ready to be married after puberty. Thus as the girl stays in school, she will finish her education before marrying.

Ethiopian health and demographic survey report indicated that women with no education marry 7.7 years earlier than women with more than secondary education which is 16.3 years versus 24.0 years (CSA, 2016).

One of the research participant who is a first year Accounting student and a messenger at a private company said how she want to get married right now , but she can't do it before getting her degree and getting a promotion on her job.

"I want to get my degree before I get married, so that I will be able to get a promotion in my job which will lead to a rise in my salary. My boyfriend is a driver at the company and I am a messenger there. Living in the city is so expensive especially the house rent, so I don't know how we could survive with this salary if we decide to get married now. And you know once you get married

you will be expected to have kids, and I know my salary wouldn't even cover a house rent let alone raising a kid. So I am delaying our marriage at least for three years till I got my degree.”(TS, 34)

Another participant said how she abstains from dating while she was in university in order to succeed in her education.

“I never dated or be in relationship when I was in campus since I considered having a boy friend as barrier. I want to give my undivided attention and dedication to my education, but now I wish if I were more active in dating when I was in college, who knows if I dated back then I might have a chance to be married by now.”(KS,38)

A participant who works two jobs stated how her busy schedule left her no time to meet guys and to go out on a date.

‘I am a very busy woman I teach at elementary school in the day time, from 8pm to 4pm and after that I tutor students three times a week and I also take night and weekend class. My schedules are always tight, sometimes I don't even see my friends for a month or above, so tell me how I can meet new people and go out on a date let alone get married.”(YO, 36)

Gordon (1994) argued that for a number of young men and women their busy work left them very little time for a relationship. Work plays an important part in the lives of single women. For most unmarried people career is the priority than family. Most of them would transcend once on top of the job or established in their career before settling down for marriage.

In Ethiopia there is also a new shift of expecting girls not simply to be educated but also to have an income rather than simply get married. These day's not just men but also women wanted to earn income before marriage, often by migrating. There is an emerging sense that young women should endeavor to get some economic independence and have some means of income before marrying. Girls aspire to migrate rather than get married especially if they had not done well in school. In some towns girls migrate to cities rather than marry, whereas in others they migrated to the Middle East (Pankhurst, 2017).

One of my participant who spend more than ten years at the middle east, working as a maid told me how she miss her chance of marrying and how her life turned out to be

“I migrated to Beirut when I was 22, and I stayed there for a solid of 12 years working as a house maid having a dream to have some means of income for myself. But things did not work in favor of me when I return to my home country after twelve year. My family misuses all the money I send and I found out my boyfriend married to another woman. You know I might be her (her ex’s wife) if I stayed here instead of migrating. Now I had to start from a scratch.”(TG, 44)

Most women in Ethiopia like my participant TG spend a considerable time of their life migrating and working in the Middle East having a dream of making some means of income for a good life when they back to their home and to start their life being economically independent of their men. While migrating and spending the majority of their life working they miss their timing of marriage in the process and they become less desirable in the eyes of men when they return to their country ready to get married.

C. Financial and social status

Women who participated in the study said being financially weak and supporting other family members with money and taking care of sick and elderly parents make them to delay their marriage and on the other hand other women said being financially strong and earn better than the guys they date make the guys to withdraw from the relationship.

Other participant who lives supporting her younger sister and elderly father said she doesn’t have a privilege to get married by now.

“I live with my old father and my younger sister, and since I have to educate my sister covering all her tuition fees and living expense and support my old father financially. Thus I don’t have the privilege to get married by now; at least I have to wait a few more years till my sister finish her education and get a job.”(QN, 32)

Another informant also spent her entire time taking care of her sick mother and her elderly father:

“My mother is very ill she never left the bed for more than ten years so I have to be with her all the time feeding her, changing her cloths, giving her medicines. My father is very old who needs my continuance support. I am the youngest in the family, all of my siblings are married and busy with their family and one is in another country. So I am the only one who is by my parent’s side to take good care of them. Hence I don’t have that much time to socialize with new people and start relation.”(SB, 39)

The case of the above woman showed losing a social support and needed by people who are close to a woman especially taken care of old and sick parents without having another person to help and support them make woman to dedicate and scarifies their time and life. And In the process woman loss their privilege to go out and meet new people whom they can date.

Another woman who has a primary education and a house wife said she is worried because she doesn’t know if the men be with her for her money or for love.

“I was engaged ones but I broke it off because I didn’t know if he was with me for my money or for my love. I worked day and night being a maid my entire life and after saving every penny I made I finally managed to build a house for me. So what if he asks for a divorce after getting in my life and took everything I have been working for and all I have. I will lose my mind for sure.”(SH, 47)

Every state has laws designating certain kinds of assets accumulated during marriage a marital property or community property even if these assets are held in the name of just one spouse. If a couple divorces, or when one spouse dies, the marital or community property will be divided between them, either by agreement or by a court. But If spouse want to avoid having some or all of their individual accumulations during marriage divided up by a court, they can do so with a premarital agreement. But having a little education and not knowing the law can grantee and secure her from losing her hose make the above research participant to delay her marriage.

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Revised Family Code Proclamation No. 213/2000 Section 3 Article 57 stated Personal Property of Spouses (1) Property not acquired by Onerous Title. The property which the spouses possess on the day of their marriage, or which they acquire after their marriage by succession or donation shall remain their personal property. The

provisions of Sub-Article (1) of this Article shall apply only when the court, at the request of one of the spouses, has decided that the property thus acquired shall be owned personally by such spouse. Article 59. — Administration of Personal Property (1) Principle also stated

- 1) Each spouse shall administer his respective personal property and receive the income thereof.
- 2) Each spouse may freely dispose of his personal property.

Women also point out how being financially independent and succeed in their education scared the men they were dating.

Research also shown that women who have finished their education, have better jobs and become highly successful appear to scare men away from them because most men feel intimidated as a result of their success. A research conducted by Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe (2011) in Nigeria revealed that women with high educational status and higher financial standings tend not to get men to marry them because the men become intimidated by their positions. This is because such women are seen as unmarriageable, arrogant and too independent, and also too confident.

One interviewee who is a finance head and have a master's degree said how her having a car scared a man she had dated.

“I had lunch with this guy my brother set me up with and after being done with our lunch date he offer to escort me to take a taxi. But I wasn't going to take a taxi because I have my own car. When I told him that he was like ohhh! ok I see so at least let me walk you to your car then and from his tone I can sense his manhood has been hurt because I have something he don't have and something he did not expect me to have just because I am a woman. Men want their woman to be less than what they are and to have less than what they have. Therefore being successful and better than them somehow scared them away and that was a total turn off to me.”(NT, 39)

Another women who is a lawyer said how her achievements in career and education make the men she dated anxious

“Nearly all the guys I dated or been set up with by my family, got scared when I told them I work as a successful lawyer at a respected law firm and I have MA degree in gender studies. The first thing I notice when I said I am a lawyer and have a MA on gender is a bit discomfort on their face and they said oh so you are a feminist, then they conclude that’s why I am still single and have the idea I am a control freak with money, power and knowledge.”(UR, 32)

In support of the above finding literature also shown that women who have finished their education, have better jobs and become highly successful appear to scare men away from them because most men feel intimidated as a result of their success. A research conducted by Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe (2011) in Nigeria revealed that women with high educational status and higher financial standings tend not to get men to marry them because the men become intimidated by their positions. This is because such women are seen as unmarriageable, arrogant and too independent, and also too confident. In support of this argument Retnaningsih, (2000) in his study also shown that educated unmarried career women are stereotyped in Indonesia society as incompetent, demanding, or too ambitious, which results in pressures from their social environments to find a soul mate or husband

From the above quotes we can see how women’s success in career and education scared the man away. Men are socialized to be in charge of everything, to have the role of a breadwinner, to have better educational attainment and economical status so if they found their woman to have more than what they have they feel intimidated. In addition women in the other hand taught to be less ambitious, to be submissive and they aspire for their looks not for what they achieve in terms of their education and career so from the above two stories we can understand that men find successful women not only intimidating but also unattractive because they taught they are less feminine.

D. Unsuccessful relations

Majority of the women had a story about a man in the past that they might have married, were on the point of marrying, were engaged to or were involved with for a considerable period of time. The man either left abruptly or the woman’s family strongly disapproved of the woman’s partner

or the men are to be found already engaged. Having broken long-term serious relationships meant reaching an age at which their chance to meet an eligible partner is reduced.

According to Bayrne, (2000)The experience of the broken romance left many women doubtful about involving themselves in future relationships, angry at the investment of time in a relationship that had no future and the lengthy time period occupied with recovering from a broken romance. On the other hand, women themselves also ended relationships, broke engagements, knowing that this is not the right person and that they are not really prepared to marry after all.

One woman who took part in in-depth interview told me how her precious eight years were wasted on the wrong guy.

“Me and my ex dated for eight years and I was so sure he was going to marry me but what actually happened was he got engaged to another girl and flew to abroad after wasting my youth and my golden eight years. If I didn’t waste my precious eight years on him I might be able to get married by now plus it was not only my time that is wasted on him I wasted my energy, my emotion, all the right feelings on the wrong guy, after that I don’t think I will be able to trust a man again to let him in my life, I guess I learned my lesson. “(SY, 50)

Mostly women start relationship hoping it will end up being a successful marriage. Unfortunately it may not be the case for the men. No matter time the men spent in relation they believe they have the privilege to start a new one at any age. This is the fact that men play the role of choosing their mate at any age. Unlike the men if the women spent such a long time in a relation it will affect her chance of selecting by other men and it will make her less desirable.

In our society woman are expected to marry at a very early age even in some parts of the country women wed before the legal marital age (18). A study conducted by Damte (2010) showed the mean Age for girls to get married in Amhara Region Demiba woreda is 12.96. Thus it is hard for a woman to waist eight years of her life. Men wanting to marry a younger girl also decline her chance of getting a suitable partner for marriage.

According to (caroline, 2003).younger brides are more desirable by Men and their families view for a number of reasons. Women who are younger have longer reproductive lives during which to have children and they are also considered as less assertive and easily controlled.

From the above quote we can also understood how ones failed relation or a broken promise can make a woman to have a trust issue. Even if she wants to get married and settled down and start her own family she always has a problem in trusting a man. Building a trust can take another significant time of her age which will prolong the time she gets married.

Another woman who is from Amhara region Burea and currently residing in Addis Ababa shared her story of how her mother made her to broke off her engagement

“I was engaged to this guy who is a school director, I think I accept his proposal just to make my mother happy and stop her whining and complaining every time I go to visit her at my home town (Burea) and I was hopeful she will be happy when I told her. The first question she ask me is what he do for a living and I told her he is a school director and she refused him the moment those words left my mouth, she don’t even know him. Then she started to lecture me how I deserve better than a school director, and she question; is it because I am being hard on you? She told me she will not give me her blessing, he was a good man but there was no any true intimacy between us. So I have to end things with him, she wants me to marry a doctor, or an engineer or successful businesses man you knows how mothers are.”(HW, 32)

The above quote indicated despite being educated or living in the city women strives to please their parents. Women who failed to married at the time their parents expect them to do feel anxious when their parents raise questions why they are not still married while their peers are doing that. Sometimes when the pressure gets tough woman decide to settle for less than what they deserve just to satisfy their parents. Like HW who has a first degree in applied chemistry and work at government institution her mother’s disappointment on her especially every time she came from a weeding just because she is not married lead her to accept a proposal of a man out of frustration just to make her mother happy. From the above quote we can see how parents pressure their children to get married and at the same time set standards whom their children to be married with. For my participant marriage is not only about affection anymore, it is rather a

means to keep everyone around her happy and quite. And it was not so hard for her to break the engagement which was not built on love at the first place.

E. Seeing failed relations

Seeing marriages of relatives such as parents, guardians and other close relatives, in terms domestic violence, divorce, and separation can be used as yardsticks to one's marriage. Daughters who observe unhappy and conflictual parent's marriage, many have a negative desire and perception about marriage in a way prolong marital delay and lead to permanent singlehood.

One of the participants who rose in a divorced family because her father was abusive said:

“Growing up in abusive family, seeing my mother beaten up by my father, seeing them always quarreling and not sharing a single love and happy moment, witnessing her (my mother) worry and terrified eyes makes me think that marriage is an institution which is designed to control, oppress and suppress woman. Having that in mind every time I date a guy and if I see things like he is asking too much questions that invade my privacy or if he is being impolite I take that he has that controlling personality and I search to see the resemblances of my father and I relate our relation with my parents relation and I build a defensive personality and end things with him.”(GZ, 43)

Another participant who grows up seeing failed relation of her neighbors and drunken husbands abusing their wife said:

“Growing up seeing an institution that let men to be as they want to be and to act as they wish and let women to be beaten, disrespected and disgraced by their alcoholic and abusive husbands no, I never wanted to be part of it.”(SY, 50)

According, Bayrne, (2000) Women consider whether traumatic familial events are possible, personal explanations for remaining single and speak about having to live with alcoholic parents/siblings; witnessing poor marital relationships of parents/relatives; being separated from parents or having to assume adult responsibilities at an early age. Women speak about wanting to live a life that was not their mother's, having grown - up in a household with many other

siblings whose parents constantly quarreled, whose mother was utterly dependent on her husband for food, clothing and shelter.

From the above quotes we can understand how growing up seeing unhappy marriage and family relations have a great effect on women to idealize marriage as an institution which is full of obstacles, abuse and they try their best not to be part of such kind of relationship. The women stated that when they were a child they were sure they will not end up getting married because they hate to be in such kind of relation. But growing up they see how hard their decision is, “when you are a woman every decision you made you have to make it considering with others feeling and attitude about that decision, your life is not just yours anymore” so now they are trying try to marry someone who is not like their father or the abusive husbands they used to see.

F. Being scared of the responsibility

Since marriage and kids comes with a lot of responsibilities and women are the sole taker of these responsibilities two women mention their fear and concern on taking this huge responsibility and enter into marriage.

One of the participants who take part in the focus group discussion stated her fear of taking the responsibility like this:

“I consider marriage as a huge institution with lots of responsibilities and I don’t think I am ready to take that responsibility yet. Growing up with my mother being the last born in the family they somehow spoil me. I didn’t know how to do a single hose chores and if I get married I am expected to do the entire house task by myself, cooking, baking, cleaning, laundry and look after the kids, I don’t think I am ready to take that responsibility now.” (AN, 30)

While another participant said how men are not ready to take responsibility and she don’t want to take the whole responsibility alone:

“I don’t think men are mature and responsible enough to start a family. I want him to take care of the baby like I do, I want to him to take enough share of household responsibilities.”(UR, 32)

Even though marriage is seen as a huge institution with lots of responsibilities most of the women don't mind having these responsibilities. Since women are socialized to be a good wife and to have a great skill in the household chores they didn't consider this as a challenge to get married, but still some women participants rose their concern on how they are scared of having this huge responsibility by themselves without having a potential spouse who is willing to share the household activities with them. Growing in a society where women are expected to take charge of all the household responsibilities in marriage the attitude of these two women is unexpected.

G. Living in the city

One woman mentioned that living in a city has influenced her to remain single. Compared to living in a small town or rural areas, living in the city was relatively easier for single women.

“Here I feel fine with my singleness; many of my friends are like me, still single. It is different if I live in my home town (Burea) most women at my age are already married and have kids. Every time I go there to visit my family I found my friends married.”(HW, 32)

Living in a city is relatively easier for single women since there are a significant number of single women who passed the expectant marital age in urban area compared to rural area. In addition to that the social interaction of the society in rural area is much closer than in the urban which leads neighbors, relatives and people around to give comment about one's marital status. The mind setup of the urban societies regarding the marriage timing is also comparatively flexible than the rural area society and it will make it less frustrated. In rural area women get married as early as possible and this will be a huge burden for women who are considered to be late to get married.

Singh and Samara (1996) in Mensch, et al. (2005) indicated that urbanization is associated with late marriages because of the nature of urban life. To them, women in urban areas are exposed to modern values and they are also less likely to be under the influence of kin who control the timing of marriage and choice of spouse; thus urbanization encourages later marriage. Thus, when one compares women in rural settlements and urban areas, one can say that those who live in urban areas are exposed to so many things like modernization, education and other modern

lifestyles. These are predominant factors of urban life thus women in cities tend to enjoy urban lifestyle therefore encouraging late marriages. Besides, as people stay in cities, they are less likely to be influenced by relatives who will put pressure on them to marry and who to marry and at what time.

4.2. Unmarried women's feelings about being single

Under this section eleven themes about feelings of unmarried women's were discussed, frustration, less connected with friends, loneliness, envy, misjudged, fear of infertility ,exhaustion, failure, less attractive, less respected, & missing something.

A. Frustration

Almost all of the participants grew frustration thinking they are missing an important life transition and also because of the comments, the gossip and the advice they get from people about their single status.

“It is not like I am glad because I am single or that I want to be alone. No one hates to get married and settle down, but what can I do about it if I can't find someone who makes me fall in love. I don't want to get married for the sake of being called a wife; I want to get married when I think my life will be better and more meaningful with a husband in it. I am fine with who I am and with my life it is everyone else that seems to have a problem with my single status.”(TN, 35)

“I am not that desperate to get married, I get used to live by myself and provide to myself, it is everyone else (family & friends) expected and wanted me to get married and I am so afraid of shattering their expectations.”(YO, 36)

“being pressured and getting comments like stop being super busy with your work and start to give attention to your life and think about your future, you are not that young any more so hurry up and marry a good guy while you have the chance, the beauty, and the time if you continue to be choosy like this you will end up being an old maid “komo ker” such kind of comments truly makes me frustrated.”(NT, 39)

“ I went to work hoping to escape from my families nagging about me not getting married and to have a relative peaceful day but hearing them (my coworkers) making my single status a discussion on the table I feel like I am trapped. Sometimes I think about packing my things and hit the road to start fresh somewhere new no one knows a single thing about me. Then I think about it and realized people are new for only a short period of time after that they are just people, so I know I can’t escape it by running away but being an issue really irritate me.”(RC, 37)

Another participant who takes part in FGD also said she is planning to resign from her work because she is bullied by her colleagues

“There are five women who worked in my department and all of them are married even the fresh graduates who enter recently get married and imagine I am their senior but I am the only single women in that department” (HW, 32)

For HW being the only single woman in her department while being a senior chemist make her a visible target to be bullied by her colleagues. Being a center of attention, compared with her minors and being laughed at make her to hate their work environment and to think resigning and look for other jobs even for lesser salary.

The above quote shows us how everyone believes they can make comments about a single women’s life and decisions. Receiving such kind of unpleasant comments make women annoyed and ruined their entire day.

“these days I can’t even tell my sister and my friends if I met a guy because they will take it way further and assume I am getting married, but they need to understand I just said I meet a guy so since I don’t want to give them false hope and shatter their dreams I stop telling them and it is so frustrating not to be able to talk such kind of things with your closed ones.”(MZ, 35)

One woman in particular, grew frustrated with the eagerness to which her family members hinted at how much they wanted her to get married by giving her a wedding gown gift.

“My sister live in abroad and she sent me a wedding gown as a gift and I was so irritated at that time. I got her message clearly but it is not the wedding gown that I need it is a man who has the same value with me. It would be good if she send the men together with the gown (laugh). Now I am renting the wedding gown and make good money (laugh).”(AM, 38)

The above quote show how families can be so eager to married off their daughter they even bought a wedding gown. Which makes the woman really irritated and she even consider this an insult. Giving a wedding gown as a gift for a woman who is not planning to have a weeding or to get married is so unusual since mostly a wedding gown is purchased or rented after a woman decide to have a weeding. Hence it shows the eagerness of the woman’s family.

Another woman said how her family stresses her out because she is single. Even her older single brothers contribute their fair of share in hurrying her to marry.

“if you are single everyone think they have a right to just barge in your life and make a comment about it and it gets tough if you are a woman, I have two older brothers who are single like me but no one seems to be bothered about their single status and there are times I wish if I were a man because there is no one nagging, stressing, pressuring and hurrying you to marry.”(YR, 30)

Studies on women’s experiences with singlehood have found that the sense of having missed an important life transition leaves many single women suffering intra- and interpersonal sanctions and feeling uncertain about their futures (Sharp & Ganong, 2007). In fact, scholars on singlehood note that it is often considered as a deficit state, marked by the lack of a relationship rather than as an entity of its own (Reynolds & Taylor, 2005)

As it is clearly seen from the above quotes women participants of this study point out their frustration because of the comments and the gossip they get. When they are constantly pressured and bullied they feel helpless and plan to run away from their home just to avoid unpleasant comments, they think throw away their career just not to be an agenda by her colleagues, to wish to be a man in order to be less pressured by others. Societal and family pressures, combined with insecurity and self-doubt, cause single people anxiety

B. Less Connected With Friends

Women who take part in this study also mention how they feel less connected with their married friends. They said ones their friends get married they have less common things to do and to talk about. And also some of them prefer not to meet their married friends because they feel like they are being pitted. And amazingly married friends are on the top of pressuring to their single friends to get married while they are expected by their single friends to understand their situation more than others due to their closeness.

“People did not stigmatize you up front they are so technical about it. Whenever I got together with my married friends I feel somehow left out and have nothing to contribute to their conversation because I am not married and I don’t have kids it seems like we are from two different world.”(SR, 45)

KS tells of how her relationship with her married friends is affected by the fact she is single:

“My married friends seek advice from their married friends, they stop coming to me for advice because they thought I am less matured and couldn’t provide them a significant advice because I am not in matrimonial relation.”(FR, 37)

Still marriage regarded as a right path to adulthood and maturity. If a woman is not engaged in a matrimonial relation she considered as less of an adult an immature. Her educational and career success and her experience in life will not make her an adult. She will not be considered as an adult in the eyes of other until she is married and gain the “wife” title.

In support of this argument Singerman (2007) evidenced in his study that the cultural meaning of adulthood is still defined by marriage. A girl becomes a woman when she is married, whether she is sixteen or sixty. An unmarried woman is seen not be mature enough to be an adult until she finds a husband. This idea comes about as a result of conventional marital ideology which perpetuates the notion that a woman does not have an adult identity except in relation to another.

The theory singlism also evidenced how marriage is valued so highly that people who seem to be unmarried are perceived negatively. Depaulo and Morris(2005) provide evidence of negative perceptions about unmarried women such as, singlehood is a stigmatized identity, singles are perceived as even more socially immature and maladjusted than married women.

“I prefer to spend more time with my single friends than the married one’s, we supported each other, talked a lot empowering stuff, spend more quality time together I don’t know but somehow we click and plus they are not always in a hurry to go home to their kids and husband.”(YO, 36)

A study conducted by Sharp & Ganong (2011) also strengthens the idea how single women cherish friendship and have close friends whom they can share problems and happiness. And most women are likely to maintain close relationships with other singles because singles have more time to hang out with their friends than those who are married.

“As soon as your married friends got married they start hammering and bullying you, and make you feel less by saying I give birth to my 2nd child and what are you still doing in your life?, sometimes it almost seems like they feel sorry for me because I don’t have what they have.”(SY, 50)

Single women are also bullied by their married friends because they are single. Their married friends want to brag about how they succeed in life even those that are in abusive relationships. One woman said how her friend who is constantly abused and beaten up by her husband, and who comes to her house to escape from him and stayed with her for a couple of days until he cooled down try to give her an advice about how she should be married by now.

Sometimes women preferred to stay in abusive relationships thinking it is better than to be single and they tend to discriminate and pressure others (singles) in order to prove for others and for themselves they are on the right path and they are doing the right thing. Yamamoto(2013) stated maintaining self-esteem is one motivation which impels married persons to discriminate singles, this motive is universal. People often try to justify their status quo and derogate out-groups to sustain their self-esteem.

In addition we can also see how marriage is valued in the society. Even those who are in an abusive relationship prefer to stay in it. Moreover they expect and pressure others to be part of it.

C. Loneliness

Single and childless women reported significantly higher levels of loneliness than married and mothers who had children. Poor health was very strongly related to greater loneliness for both men and women. Marital status is significant, never married and formerly married women (separated, divorced, and widowed) reporting more loneliness than married women (Singh & Kiran,2013)

Holidays reminded them of their single status, encouraging thoughts about their romantic lives, and increasing the likelihood of experiencing sadness. In addition, weddings and childbirths of friends, coworkers, and family members served as triggers.

“When it is a holiday I prepare the entire feast like I bake “enj¹era” and bread, I cook “doro ²wet”, I make “te³la”, I clean the house, I change the shit and the curtains. I do the entire stuff married women do for the holiday and the house looks and smells like holiday but I feel like something is missing, I feel a whole in my chest since there is no man beside me to celebrate the holiday with me, to test the food I cook, to drink the tela I make, to share this holiday feeling and mood with me, I really felt lonely at times of holiday”(SH, 47)

“At times of sickness when I seek others help to taken care of me, I wish if I had a husband who is here to look after me”(SY, 50)

Women specially those who lived alone felt lonely and recognize their single status especially at time of holidays, when people are supposed to be surrounded by their loved ones and share the holiday sprite..In Ethiopia people give huge attention to holiday celebration. And the culture is to celebrate the holidays with families and loved ones. As it is said by the participants those moments are hard for them and mark their single status because they don't have their own family and their loved ones by their side to celebrate with which lead to make them feel a great deal of loneliness

¹ It is a sourdough-risen flatbread with a slightly spongy texture. Traditionally made out of Teff flour, it is the national dish of Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, and Eritrea.

² It is Ethiopian and Eritrean stew prepared with chicken.

³ It is alcoholic beverage brewed by barley or corn and flavored with powered leaves and twigs.

Literature also evidenced Holidays reminded single women their single status, encouraging thoughts about their romantic lives, and increasing the likelihood of experiencing sadness (Sharp and Ganong, 2011).

In addition people also seek to be taken care of by others especially by their loved ones at time of sickness and crisis. Single woman who does not have close family by their side felt in need of a person to take care of them at time of sickness. Sometimes they can't even be in a condition to feed themselves and/or fetch a glass of water.

Almost all participants indicate their fear of getting old without having a support. Being alone at old age you need to have a spouse or a child that support you at time of weakness or sickness.

“I live with my mom but I got scared when I think if something happened to her you know no one lives forever I really got worried to be old and alone.”(MD, 30)

D. Envy

Even if valentine day is a western culture and a new trend in Ethiopia some people especially those who live in the city celebrate it. While it is a couple oriented event, it makes single women to be conscious about their single status, and to want to have what others have.

“At holiday and valentine days seeing my friends and my cuisines are getting gifts, spending romantic time with their spouse I envy that, I want to feel what they feel, I want to have that kind of emotional attachment with the opposite sex, I want to feel loved and to feel special in someone's eyes.”(TN, 35)

Another interviewee also indicated how she day dream when she attend weddings:

“When I attend weddings and when I see the bride and the groom looking happy I say to myself oh it is cute to be couple and witnessing every one being so happy for them makes me want to be in their place and I start day dreaming.”(UR, 32)

“I feel jealous when I see my brother in –laws taking care of my sisters, having their back at time of dispute, or support them at time of crisis. We lost our father a couple of years ago and that was the most difficult and traumatic time of our life and we all are grieving by the loss of our father and that is when I really felt envy

seeing my sisters having their husbands by their side taking care of them, trying to make them feel better and comforting them, I really wish if I had someone like that during that moment.”(TG, 44)

In support of the above quotes Sharp and Ganong (2011) stated Holidays and couple oriented events are frequent reminder of single women’s deviant life paths. Events that reminded them they are different from the rest of the group are triggers for single people to feel lonely and envy. these reminders included couple-oriented holidays such as New Year’s Eve and Valentine’s and family-oriented holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. Holidays reminded them of their single status, encouraging thoughts about their romantic lives, and increasing the likelihood of experiencing sadness. In addition, weddings and childbirths of friends, coworkers, and family members served as triggers.

In addition Byrne(200) pointed out that women described family occasion, birthdays, weddings, holydays, dinner parties, social settings in which most people are coupled or tied by parent, child and intimate family relationships as being particularly challenging for them and the least inviting. These occasions are reminders that others perceive single women as different and expect women to account for this difference, these reminders are painful.

E. Misjudged

Unmarried women are blamed because people think they must have some character problem to remain single.. Morris et al. (2004) stress this idea by saying unmarried persons often are viewed as responsible for their single status people think they are single because of their promiscuity, immaturity, self-centeredness, or a lack of personal discipline.

“People assume I am single because I am too greedy to share what I have and too selfish who likes to eat alone and did not want to share what I have and what I get to others.”(KS, 38).

“My mother start to assume that I am engaged in promiscuous relation, she think I become like the city girls who have a sexual relation with different men and did not want to settle.” (HW, 32)

“People think of me as someone who is not serious or mature. They think I am still single because I don’t take life seriously and all I want is to flirt with every guy and play with his heart and his money.”(MA, 31)

“People assume I am a gold digger and all I did is wasting a men’s money and did not take life and marriage seriously. The sad part is even my own father is think of me like that.”(ES, 32)

Single women are mostly perceived negatively by others and people conclude they are still single because they have some personality difficulty. And such kinds of perceptions make single women to isolate themselves from others (family, friends, colleagues or strangers) which create difficulties on their relation with them.

F. Fear of Infertility

All women who took part in this study are childless and almost all of them want to give birth in wedlock. And they are more scared of not having kids than not being married. Even though it is not it is not something to choose for, quite number of participants prefers to give birth out of wedlock rather than to remain childless.

“What scares me the most is not being able to give birth because we women are not guaranteed on that spot, we can’t say we can give birth any time we want, a man can reproduce until the day he die but we only have limited number of year to be able to carry a baby.”(SY,50)

One informant who is in her mid 40’s is losing hope if she can be a mother:

“I have been groomed to be mothers since I was a little girl. But know that I am in my mid 40’s I am not sure if I will get the chance to have kids and to be a mother.”(SR, 45)

Another participant is scared of the complications of giving birth to a healthy child that come with age that scares most:

“As I witness it from my work, kids who have younger parents are more active and brilliant at school than those who are from older parents, seeing this I worry

all the time I about not have a healthier baby let alone not having them at all.”(YO, 36)

One participant who is a nurse raises her concern about let pregnancy like this:

“I observer from my work late pregnancy put kids at risk of different health problems and I got scared not to be one of those women, I am in my mid 30’s and I don’t know when I will have my own kids.”(FR,37)

a participant point out how sometimes she think to be a single mother but scared to do it when she think what will others say about it:

. “I know I don’t need to have a husband to have kids, and I sometimes think about giving birth out of wedlock and being a single mom and I know that (having kids) will make me happy. But I got scared when I think about what people will say about it and what will I answer when my kids grow up and start asking about their father. I also don’t want to be selfish and take their father out of the picture and make my kids grow up without having a father figure.”(TG, 44)

Knowing risks and concerns associated with later childbearing is another fear of older unmarried women, Women were aware of their increasing risk of infertility as they aged. Since most women preferred to have children within a marriage, they had not yet had children. In addition, women were concerned about genetic complications associated with having children at older ages. Another concern was being an older parent; they worried about having reduced energy, and they are also worried about the increasing age gap between their future children and themselves with each year that passed (Sharp & Ganong, 2011).

In Ethiopian culture it is a taboo to give birth out of wedlock. If a woman gives birth out of wedlock she will bring shame to her family and her new born baby will be tagged as “*dikala*” which is an insulting word to indicate the baby has no father or his roots is unknown. Since women did not want to bring shame to their family and make their child raised as “*dikala*” all participants indicate they want to give birth after they get married and for those women waiting for to give birth after getting married means risking their fertility.

G. Failure

Since marriage is a social norm and also a holy duty in our country context women who are not married perceived and feel like they failed on life.

“I am a kind of person who work hard and struggle to achieve something I planned, I will not have a rest and a peace of mind unless I achieve it, while getting married in my 20’s was one of a life goal I set to achieve I feel like I failed on that.” (RC, 38)

“My family thinks I failed on life because I am not married. I accomplish in my education and have a great job and earn well but they don’t see that as much of an accomplishment. Sometimes I feel like they might be right and I question myself.”(NT, 39)

The above woman sometimes doubts her achievements since it is not recognized by others. All the hard work and dedication she puts in her life gets less value because she is couldn’t achieve what most people seem to achieve

Sharp and Ganong (2007), also stressed that society perceives a woman not fully accomplished despite her accomplishing education and career unless she is married. To Sharp and Ganong irrespective of a woman’s achievement in life, society still sees her not to be accomplished unless she ties the knot with a man.

According to the social constructivism theory dominant beliefs within society, influence each individual’s perception of what is real and certain dominant beliefs regarding women who remain single past the expectant marital age hold a negative connection that women internalize and adopt as truth. The above quote indicated how she internalizes what she has been perceived by her families like a failure and felt like it might be true.

H. Exhaustion

Most women in this study said that they often have to explain their singleness to many people; not only to their family but also to friends or even to people they have just met. It was not easy;

some people would pity them for being never married while other blamed' them for being too choosy or too selfish

“People expected me to provide a good excuse or adequate reason why I am still single and explaining this to each and everyone suck my energy out. Sometimes they even bring up about my exes and say why did you break up with him? He seemed like a nice guy and that is like opening old wounds.”(UR, 32)

A literature also evidenced unmarried women have many explanations and questions to answer in regards to circumstances behind their single status. Single woman is expected to have an explanation for her condition, preferably a story of circumstances and missed opportunities (Reynolds and Wetherell 2003).

In support of this Byrne, (2000) stated that women participated in his study routinely commented that their singleness is always a matter for discussion, curiosity and a basis for inquiry from others. Most people assumed that women in their thirties are married: if they are not, they are required to explain their single status.

The above quote implies unmarried women are expected to explain and justify being never married at their age. They are told by families and friends that they were too picky in terms of the men they found attractive. They must be ready to answer the question why? What? And how come they are unmarried while members of their societies think at certain point in their lives they must be married. They are expected to tell circumstances behind their status or certain behaviors that led them to still be single.

I. Less Attractive

“Every time a year is added to my birthday being still single, I feel cranky because I feel I am getting ugly, less attractive, less desired and wanted. I consider there is an hour glass to my beauty and every time the sand sinks so does my beauty and attractiveness”(SB, 39)

The above quote shows how a women's quality is attached to her outside look and attractiveness and how she think beauty is important in finding a partner. Women reaching their mid thirties and above feel less sexy and desirable which lead them to be less satisfied and less happy with life.

J. Less Respected

Irrespective of their age and other accomplishments single women treated with less respect than married ones. Even younger married women gain much respect from the society and their family than older single women.

“I feel less respected within my family just because I am single; I see my younger siblings and cuisines who are married getting more respected just because they are married, I feel like I am considered as a joke in my family, everyone come and say what every they felt like saying and give me comments and ordering me to do things like a kid.”(AM, 38)

“In our society a woman get respected when she have a husband or if she is a mother thinking she have someone to protect her and I feel like I would be more respected if I was married and/or if I was a mother.”(SR, 39)

According to coontz (2004) for all socioeconomic groups, marriage was the most important marker of adulthood and respectably. It was the primary way of organizing work along lines of age and gender. A study conducted by (Byrne, 2000) strengthens the idea that marriage is still regarded as the preferred pathways to adult identity for women, one which single women do not take. As a result, both gender identity and adult identity are in question. A lot of women felt that they are not treated with the same respect as married persons.

K. Missing something

“I never felt incomplete because I am single but sometimes I feel like I am missing something in life without acknowledging and recognizing it, I don't know what I am missing, and I ask myself is it kids? Or is it what? I am curious what I could

miss out of life because I am not married, who knows maybe I will found it out when I get married.”(QN, 32)

Women also feel they are missing something from life because they are not entered in an institution that everyone expected them to be entered by now. And this feeling of “*missing something*” perpetuated when they are constantly advised how they should be married by now or receive unwelcome comments. They think people especially closed ones are pressuring and pushing them to marry because they might saw something great in marriage and they don’t want them to miss that life.

4.3. Positive Aspects of Remaining Single

A. Freedom

Freedom to make their own choices was the primary positive aspect of singlehood realized by the majority of the participants and was discussed in terms of decisions relating to a variety of things, from how to spend money to how to how to spend their time. For many participants it was the ability to do whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted, however they wanted. Participants treasured the fact that the decisions they made were for themselves, rather than having to compromise or make choices bearing someone else’s interests in mind. The ability to set one’s own schedule was another huge asset perceived by the participants

“I like to be alone and do the things I want to do with my time, nobody cares about my time schedule and I don’t have to consent anyone on how to spend my money, I can sleep the whole day without being disturbed by others, I fell like a free bird.”(UR, 32)

This freedom that the participants reported to enjoy can be linked to the main benefit of being single mentioned in the literature: Single women in other studies also indicate that they appreciate the independence they experience in various aspects of their lives (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Baumbusch, 2004; Lewis & Moon, 1997), and the autonomy to live their lives the way they pleased (Dales, 2014; Wang & Abbott, 2013). Similar to the participants in the current study, the women in other studies enjoy the freedom of not having to consider another person, being able to choose their own social activities, and controlling their own finances

B. Education and Career Advancement

Many participants felt that some of the things they had done and accomplished in their lives thus far would not have been possible if they had been married. For some, these were accomplishments related to their careers, whereas for others it is related to educational achievements”

“I manage to get a promotion in my job and to continue my education because I am single but if I were married I might be raising kids instead of raising my career and I may not even have my second degree or I you might find me trying to have it all and being super exhausted and stressed out in the process.”(SY, 50)

“when I see my sisters being super busy doing the office work the whole day and taking the role of a wife at night and taken care of their kids and their husbands I feel blessed because there is no one expecting me at home to be taken cared by me and that give me enough time to rest or to do whatever I want.”(NT, 39)

Not being in matrimonial relationship grant women to have more free time to do better in school and also in their carriers. Not being needed by others (husband and kids) to look after them give single women a privilege to compete with their male colleagues succeed in their education and career path. Singles are not locked into family responsibilities and obligations they consequently can be more mobile and flexible in the climb up the career ladder.

4.4. Downsides to Remaining Single

Under this section two themes about negative aspects of being single, which are experiencing unsolicited advice and unwelcome comments unmarried women received were discussed

A. Experiencing unsolicited advice

Respondents were asked about their marital status by friends, family members, and coworkers, which served to draw explicit attention to their single status. They felt they had to explain and justify being never married at their ages.

Although there were instances when respondents sought advice from friends and family, they frequently were given unsolicited directives. All the women were told (mostly by their close friends and mothers) that they were too picky in terms of the men they found attractive.

In addition, all women experienced others “setting them up” (i.e., arranging blind dates) with men. Respondents believed that others assumed that they would be happier with a partner than without. Most preferred not to be set up because they had bad experiences in the past; they felt pathetic dating this way and/or they worried that they might create tension with their friends if they did not like the men.

“my brother make me date this guy and he did not even say I want you try it out he said I found you a husband and he was so sure I was going to marry the guy and what actually happened when I talk to the guy was no disrespect but we can’t even communicate properly he was kind slow and I took such kind of set ups or blind dates as an insult that people are questioning my ability to attract a man by myself and to select my potential life partner.”(YR, 30

4.5. Unsolicited Comments unmarried women received

Being questioned about remaining single or not marrying is a common experience for single women. Intimates and strangers alike comment on women’s single status. Most of the comments single woman received from family, friends, coworkers and even from people they just met are; don’t be too picky and idealist, love will happen eventually, you will face problem in giving birth, don’t be so swollen with pride, your beauty will fade away and your life will stuck.

“I have been told a lot not to be picky or choosy, but how can I not be I mean I am the kind of person who carefully pick out my cloths and my shoes so how do they expect me not to be so picky in choosing my life partner”(NT, 39)

For the above women not being picky is impossible. She questions it saying she is the kind of person who carefully selects her clothes so she don’t see how she can’t be picky with the man she is going to spend her whole life.

“They (family and friends) said don’t be picky, marriage is about compromising, there is no perfect man so you need to lower your standard. There is no single guy who is designed perfectly just the way you wanted him so learn to lower your standard and compromise”(YR,30)

Women also told there is no perfect guy who is designed just the way they wanted him to be so they need to lower their standard and compromise to get married.

“A wise woman knows how to change her man and redesign him as she wants him to be so you will change him through time.”(MD, 30)

A woman is also responsible on redesigning and reshaping the man in order to make him the way she wanted because she is told that is what wise women do.

“People told me love don’t happen overnight. They said you may not love the guy right away but you will for him eventually. People don’t get married because they fall in love, you will start to fall for him when you start to share a household to care for each other and to have kids together. But I don’t buy it what if I don’t fall for him after we got married I don’t want to get divorce, I hate to be labeled divorced I prefer to stay and to be labeled single.”(MA, 31)

The above quote showed us marriage did not build out of love; people get married because that is what expected from them and this could be a number one reason for divorce and my participant don’t want to get married just the sake of being a wife she wanted build a home that is based on love and companionship.

“People have no shame telling me my life would be stuck after a few more years and my beauty and youth will be disappear”(MZ, 39)

A quality of life for a woman is measured by her connection with a man if she doesn’t have a man in her life or a child her life is considered as dull and she is told her beauty is fading which is considered as a weapon to attract a man and to get hitched. Such kind of comments makes women to have a doubt in herself which leads to be less satisfied and happy in life.

“You are so swollen with pride because of your looks and your education but nothing last forever and you will be troubled to give birth if you married late.”(UR, 32)

Having a criteria for a potential suitor and being carefully picky with the man she date make a women to be perceived as she is arrogant who is swallow with pride because of her looks and her educational achievements.

Only One woman said how her mother wants her to stay single till her older sister gets married

“Since my older sister hasn’t married yet, I didn’t get many comments about my single status. I am even informed by my mother to stay single till my older sister get married, but I got some comments from close friends how they would be happy if I get married by now.”(AN, 30)

Though most of the women are pressured to get married and received unwelcome advices and comments the above women get a different comment or an order from her mother not to get married before her older sister.

4.6. Coping Mechanism

Under this section two themes were presented to show the mechanisms women used to cope with their own desire of marriage and the pressure they a got from others.

A. Coping with the internal pressure to marry

Most of the women said they cope with their own desire of marriage by being patient and believing on God/Allah has a bigger plan for them.

“I have faith in Allah and I believe that things happen for a reason and he won’t want me to end up alone and he will not give me some one less than I deserve so I have a huge faith on him and I believe he make me wait this long to give me something great.”(MD, 30)

“I told myself I have done everything on my power so I leave it to god plus I am not that desperate to get married I don’t get that much stressed out of it”(YO, 36)

The above two women said they have a faith on God/Allah. And they believe things happen for a reason, which means not being married until now, have a good reason on the eyes of god. They believe if it is a God's will for them to be single then it is for a good reason.

In our society religion is the base for different activities people do. Marriage is among those activities and it is believed to be an institution designed by God. There for as we can see from the above two quotes women use religion and their connection with God as a means to cope their internal desire to marry. Their faith on God is making them to wait for a good reason help them to have faith and hope he will be blessed them with some one great. Furthermore leaving what they can't accomplish on God somehow give them a peace of mind.

Another woman said seeing her accomplishment in life is her remedy to cope with the pressure to marry.

"I talk a lot with myself and I try to look at my accomplishments in life and when I do that I feel like I am on the right truck and when I think I wouldn't be able to achieve what I achieve right now if I were married I feel like I am on the right path."(UR, 32)

Looking back and counting their accomplishments in life, and thinking their accomplishments wouldn't be true if they weren't single. Believing their single status grantee them a privilege of leisure time to succeed in their career and educational path make women think they are on the right truck. Since being in marriage consume a huge amount of time and energy woman couldn't achieve as she could when she is single. Some of the participants who have a good career and who do well in education believe it is all possible because they are single. Though they agreed it might be also possible in marriage only if they have a partner who understands and support them.

Another coping mechanism told by the participants is witnessing failed relation of others specially their friends' relations

"Seeing failed relation of others make me think I am better of single. I told myself marriage is not only full of good things it has its own obstacles and being single is not also that bad it has its own opportunities."(TN, 35)

The above participant use witnessing failed relations of others as a coping mechanism for her desire to marriage. Not being part of the crisis and trauma caused by divorce and saving herself from headache and sorrow make her think she is better of single.

Dealing with another human being is hard and sometimes marriage ended up in divorce. For woman seeing the disaster caused by divorce and failed relations make them to see their single status as a peaceful state which will they are fine with their single status.

B. Coping with family and friends pressure to marry

Women said that to some extent they are subject to pressure to marry from many people around them. For many women the main source of pressure comes from their mothers and married friends.

When asked how they cope with the pressure, most women said they be firm and told others it is a God's will so it will happen when he said. Others said they ignore the comments or take them as a joke and they avoid people who commented on their status or they stop attending social gatherings. These seem to be the most popular strategy in coping with the pressure to marry for many women in the study.

"I told people it is beyond my ability, I can't create a man with my own hands if God didn't create me one already." (SH, 47)

Telling people she did not choose to be single but she have no choice if it is not a God's will for her to get married yet used as a means to cope the pressure and stigma she face from the society. Since it is believed marriage is a holy institution that people will only inter when God permit it work as a good excuse for a woman to show she is not a deviant or against the holy duty or the cultural institution.

"I ignore most of the negative comments I receive but I got mad sometimes when people try to judge me without knowing a single thing about me." (ES, 32)

“I mostly nod and sound like I agree with their comments and ignore them” (AN, 30)

One of the respondent mention how it makes her mad when people give negative comments and judged her without knowing her life ups and downs. Whether it is out of good concern or not, she believes it is unfair to give judgments on others life path.

“When friends and families try to raise the issue I change the subject or stop the conversation, because hearing them commenting about my status make me uneasy and I am afraid it might lead me to make wrong decisions” (AS,34)

The above participant is forced to change the subject or totally stop the conversation when her families start to talk about her single status. Such kind of conversation makes a women’s interaction with her family not to go smoothly and prevent her from spending a quality time with her family. She is not only uncomfortable with such kind of conversation but also afraid of making a wrong decision due to the pressure.

“I am getting used to the comments it is like I am adapting them they stop affecting me as they used to, but I still feel sad if those comments are raised by the people I thought they know me and understood my situation better” (TG, 44)

“I fire back and attack them as the way they are attacking me and the funny part is they got offended when I do that” (YR, 30)

Another participant said she fire back and attacks those who make offensive comments about her being unmarried. But firing back make her exhausted and mostly affect her relation with her others since they get offended when she do that.

Another participant indicates how it is important for a single woman to develop a good sense of humor.

“When you are single you need to have a good sense of humor, I make fun of the comments I receive and take them jokingly and eventually people will stop commenting when they know you are not taking them seriously. Otherwise you will end up burned-out”. (AM, 38)

She makes fun of the comments she got and teases the people who make comments about her single status which make them to get the idea she is not taking them and their comments seriously. Which makes them to refrain themselves from making comments and bothering her.

“I usually avoid people who gave me comments about my status. I do even stop answering very close friends and relatives phone calls and I stop attending social gatherings and visiting relatives” (QN, 32)

“I try to reduce the frequency I go to my home town to visit my family. I am looking for a job even for equal or lower salary just to get out of the pressure I get from my colleagues, and I am also dating as many men as possible to get marry as soon as possible.” (HW, 32)

“I totally stop attending weddings since weddings are one of the social gatherings single women will be bullying by everyone in public.” (SY, 50)

Almost all the women use different mechanisms to cope with the stigma and the pressure to marry most of the women stop attending weddings or others social gatherings which emphasize their singleness. Coupled and family social events mark the single woman as an outsider, as different and are settings which provide opportunities for others to inquire why women remain single. These occasions are reminders that others perceive single women as different and expect women to account for this difference: these kinds of occasions are challenging for women and least inviting. And women are learned to avoid such kind of occasions.

Another means to cope with the stigma and the pressure is clarifying why they are still single and explaining their situation. women think giving such kind of explanation will help them to state they are not deviant who want to break the social norm and who are against marriage but some situation make them to stay single. These explanations also give assurance they are not planning to stay single forever for others and also for themselves.

Other women take the comments lightly and pretend they accept it or make fun of the comments in contrast others may feel sadden about the comments and back fire which lead them to end up in fight or offending others.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1. Summary

The objective of the study was investigating the lived experience of unmarried women above the age of thirty residing in Addis Ababa City. Base on the aforementioned general objectives, this study attempted to identify the reasons why single women are still unmarried, discovered single women's feelings about being unmarried, explored comments unmarried women received about their marital status, and investigated coping mechanisms used by unmarried women to cope their internal desire to marry and the pressure and stigma they face from the society.

The research methodology that was applied for this study to gain a deeper understanding of women's experience being single past the expectant marital age was a phenomenological qualitative approach. Data for the study was obtained through conducting semi-structured in-depth interview and focus group discussions.

The reason to remain single were identified and presented under seven headings, not finding the right person for marriage mark as a major reason for women to remain single, education and career is another significant reason for women to remain single working to gain some means of income before getting married or wanting to achieve certain educational goals before entering into marriage make women delay marriage, financial and social status being financially weak, supporting other family members financially, taken care of sick and elderly parents make women to loss their privilege to marry or to date on the other hand being financially strong and having

higher educational attainment scared the men a way and make withdraw from the relationship, unsuccessful relations/broken promises having a broken promise waste a significant time of women and make them to have a trust issue to start a new relationship, witnessing failed relations of others as a child also has a great impact on picturing marriage as an institution that is full of obstacle and designed to oppress and suppress women which make women to decide not to be part of it, being scared of the responsibility since marriage comes with lots of responsibilities women delay marriage in fear of being the sole taker of the whole responsibility without having a potential husband who is willing to share responsibilities, living in the city somehow influence women to delay marriage since they are close to modernization and particularly less pressured compared to rural settings.

Unmarried women's feelings about being single were found out to be, frustration due to missing an important life transition and because of the pressure they face, less connected with their married friends once their friends get married they have less common things to do or to talk about, loneliness caused by not having a close person or their own family to share major life events, envy of being taken cared by other person, being loved, and wanting to have what other married couples are having at some occasions, misjudged because they are single and being perceived negatively, fear of infertility since almost all of the women want to give birth in wedlock they are putting themselves at risk of fertility, failure women's accomplishment in life didn't get enough credit in the eyes of others which make them to doubt their success in other courses of life and make them feel like a failure, exhaustion as a result of explaining why they are still single to everyone and getting unwanted comments and advices, less attractive at time goes women feel like they are being less attractive in the eyes of men which led them to be less satisfied with life, less respected women feel like they are not getting enough or equal respect as their married counterparts despite their age and position in the society because they are not married and have a husband, missing something they feel like they might have been missing something out of life because they are not married.

The positive aspects of being single are found out to be freedom in terms of decision making starting from how and where to spend their time to how to spend their money and also making their own plan without having a consent of another person and the other positive aspect is

educational achievements and career advancement. The downsides of remaining single are experiencing unwelcome advices, comments and being pressured a lot.

Coping mechanisms used by women to put themselves at ease are being patient and believe God has a bigger plan for them, seeing failed relations of others (friends & family) and not being part of the trauma caused by divorce, and looking back at their achievements and believing it wouldn't be true if they were not single. Women also cope with the pressure and the stigma they face by explaining why they are still single, by taking lightly peoples comments and negative perceptions, and by avoiding social gatherings that could highlight their single status.

Finally being single at the age of thirty and above proved to be an issue of concern and single women pressured a lot by their closed ones, they perceived negatively and draw unnecessary attention towards them.

5.2. Conclusion

Although marriage has been widely studied, few studies have explored the experience of single women past expectant marital age. This study provides an in-depth account of how women experience singlehood, their reasons for their single status, unmarried women feelings regarding their single status as well as how they negotiate that status in their communication and interaction with others.

In the society where marriage is considered as an important institution for human development and personal satisfaction the lack of such relationship leads to social stigmatization and marginalization. This stigmatization and marginalization process is highly associated with gender and age. Women who lack to have matrimonial relation are more marginalized and stigmatized than men. And women considered past the expectant martial age are highly stigmatized than women who considered as the right age for marriage.

Women's unmarried status usually leads others to have negative perception towards them. Being single by itself it was not that much of problem for most of my participant rather it is the means judgment negative perception and the pressure they get because of their status make their life somehow difficult.

Being single a phase of the whole life course, although some of the unmarried women in this research their preference of singleness like one of the participant who may need more time to be recovered from her past failed relation, even though most of this women have a different reasons for their single status, they shall the same ambition to get married sometime in the future.

It is important to recognize that this study was limited geographically, as it was conducted solely in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Religious diversity was also significant limitation in this study. Twenty three of the participants were Christian and one of the participants was Muslim. I would be interesting to see how similarly situated women from various religious background experiences being single and how they negotiate their status.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on the findings presented in this paper, the following recommendations are proposed.

- Ensuring a stable employment opportunity for women in their home country will reduce the number of women who migrate to the Middle East to get a job and have a means of income that leads to delay marriage.
- Not only enrolling girls to school but also making sure they got enough access and time to compete and succeed equal with men. This will help women to find a stable job with good salary in their home country since most of the women migrate to Middle East if they hadn't done well in school. A well educated woman is a well-informed wife and mother; she will always be a better guide for children. And an economically independent woman can always stand by her husband to strengthen financially root of the family.
- One of the reasons for women to delay marriage is high cost of living specially housing. A government needs to pay a huge attention in lowering the cost to purchase or to rent a house.
- Women delay marriage in fear of taking the whole responsibility by themselves and having the double burden (the office work and the house hold work including raising kids) if a government and private companies/employers provide a day care service for employees it will initiate women to marry.
- Creating awareness through media or public dialogue that in marriage both parties need to have equal share of the responsibilities in the household course and in taking care of the kids that will lower women's burden in marriage and make them want to marry.

- Limited information are available on this topic so researchers need give emphasis to the issue and provide other significant findings, since the issue will be acknowledged as a problem that needs the public attention if it will be echoed and supported with other significant findings.

Reference

- Adichie, C.N. (2014). *We should all be feminist*. vintage books a division of random house LLC New York.
- Allman, J. (1996). Rounding up Spinsters: Gender chaos and unmarried women in Colonial Asante. *The Journal of African History*, 37(2), 195-214: Cambridge University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/sle/183183>
- Allen, K.R. (1989). *Single women family ties: life history of older women*, sag publication, Newbury Park.
- Amadiume, I. (1987). *Male daughters, female husbands, gender and sex in African society*. London: Zed books.
- Amsalu, H. (2007). *Causes and consequences of early marriage among Selale Oromo women: The case study of Hindabu Abote and Kuyu Woredas, North Shewa Zone, Oromia national Religious State*. Unpublished MA Thesis In Gender Studies. Addis Ababa University.
- Aniciete, D, & Solsoki, K. L. (2011). The social construction of marriage and a narrative approach to treatment of intera-relationship diversity. *Journal of family therapy* 23, 03-126.
- Berend,Z. (2000). *The best or none: Singlehood in nineteenth century New England*. *Journal of Social History*.
- Berger, P. & Lukman, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. London: penguin books

- Brayan, (2008). Social research method. Oxford university press, Newyork.
- Budgeon, S. (2008). Couple culture and the production of singleness. *Sexualities, 11*, 301-326. doi:10.1177/1363460708089422
- Byrne, A & Carr, D. (2005). Caught in the cultural lag: The stigma of singlehood. *Psychological inquiry* vol. 16, nos. 2&3, 84-141.
- Byrne, A. (2003) developing a sociological model for researching women's self and social Identities. *European journal of women's studies*.
- Carga, L & Melko, M. (1982). Singles: myth and realities, sag publications, Berely Hills, CA.
- Cherlin,.A.J. (2004).The deinstitutionalization of American marriage. *Journal of marriage and family*
- Cherlin, A.J. (2010). The marriage ground: The state of marriage and the family in America today. New York, NY: Vintage books
- Clark, M. S., & Graham, S. M. (2005). Do relationship researches neglect singles? Can we do better? *Psychological Inquiry, 16*, 131-136. doi: 10.1080/1047840X.2005.9682919
- Conley, T. D., & Collins, B. E. (2002). Gender, relationship status, and stereotyping about sexual risk. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28*, 1483-1494. doi: 10.1177/014516702237576
- Coontz, S. (2004). The world historical transformation of marriage. *Journal of marriage and family*
- Coontz, S.(2005). Marriage, a history: from obedience to intimacy or how love conquered marriage. New York, NY: Viking
- Corbin, J., & Staruss, A. (1990). Basics of qualitative research: grounded theory procedures and thechniques. Nwebury park, CA: Sage.
- Crespi, I. (2003). Gender socialization within the family: a study on adolescent and their parents in Great Britain catholic university of Milan
- Central Stastical Authority Ethiopia (2011). Ethiopian demographic and health survey, Addis Ababa Ethiopia.
- Central Statistical Agency Ethiopia (2014). Ethiopia Mini Demographic and Health Survey Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

- Central Statistical Agency Ethiopia and ICF (2016). *Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey 2016: Key Indicators Report*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Rockville, Maryland, USA. CSA and ICF.
- Curry, L.A., Nembhard, I.M., Bradely, E.H.(2009). Qualitative and mixed methods provide unique contributions to outcomes research. *Circulation* 119: 1442-1452
- Damte G (2010). Early marriage and parent's socio-economic status in peasant communities: The case of Gendwabalegev and Genvavasajl peasant association in Dembia Woreda of North Gonder, Amhara Region. Unpublished MA Thesis In Gender Studies. Addis Ababa University.
- David P., Lindstorm, Gebreegziabher k. and Dennis p.(2009).Transition into first intercourse, marriage, and childbearing among Ethiopian women.
- Bella M. DePaulo & Wendy L. Morris (2005) TARGET ARTICLE: Singles in Society and in Science, *Psychological Inquiry*, 16:2-3, 57-83, DOI:10.1080/1047840X.2005.9682918
- Dozokoto, V.A.A & Darkwain, A.K. (2014) if times change, should we throw away the hearthstone? Exploring discontinuities in autonomy and decision-making in live of Ghanaian women.*frontiers in psychology, African American studies, Department of sociology, center for Gender studies and advocacy, university of Ghana, Legon, Ghana.*
- Flick, U. (2017). *The sage handbook of qualitative data analysis*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Gallagher, M.(2004). Does sex babies? Marriage and legal justification for the regulation of intimacy in a post Lawrence world
- Glynn, K.N (2013). Always a brides maid never a bride: examining the deinstitutionalization of marriage and the modern day spinster thesis: bois state university
- Gordon, T. (1994). *Single women on the margin?* The MacMillan press, London
- Greitemeyer, T. (2009). Stereotypes of singles: Are singles what we think? *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 39, 368-383. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.542
- Grils not brides. (2015) facts sheet:: Ethiopians national strategy and action plan article on harmful traditional practices.
- Guday Emirie (2005). Early Marriage and its Effects on Girls' Education in Rural Ethiopia: The Case of Mecha Woreda in West Gojjam, North Western Ethiopia. Ph. D Dissertation. Social and Cultural Anthropology. Georg August University of Goettingen, Germany.
- Gyekye, K. (2002). *African cultural values, an introduction*. Accra Advent press.

- Haralamb, M., & Hollborn, M. (2000). *Sociology themes and perspectives*. London: Harper Collins Publisher Ltd.
- Hertel, J., Schutz, A., Chemintz, T. U., Depaulo, B. M., Morris, W. L., McDaniel, & Stucke, T. S. (2007). She is single so what? How singles are perceived compared with people who are married? *Journal of family studies*.
- Hoffman, L. (1990). Constructing realities: An art of lenses. *Family process*, 29, 1-12
- <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definatio/marriage>
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/marriage>
- Jones, B.C., Sam book, S., & Irvine, F.(2008). Research methodology: The phenomenological focus group: an oxymoron? *Journal of advanced nursing*.
- Kalmijn, M. (1998). Intermarriage and homogamy: causes, patterns, trends. *Annual review sociology*
- Karl, T.(2015). Radical feminist perspective on the family .Article
- Kaiser, C. R., & Kashy, D. A. (2005). The contextual nature and function of singlism. *Psychological Inquiry*, 16, 122-126. doi:10.1080/1047840X.2005.9682919
- Kathari, C..R. (1990). *Research methodology: methods and techniques* (2nd edition). University of Rajasiban Jaipur(India).
- Kearney, M.H. (2001). Levels and applications of qualitative research evidence. *Research in nursing and health*: 145-153.
- Keyton, J. (2011). *Communication research: Asking questions, finding answers* 3rd ed. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Kile, C. (1992). Endless love will keep us together: The myth of romantic love and contemporary popular movie love themes. In J. Nachbar & K. Lause, (Eds.), *Popular culture: An introductory text* (pp. 149-166). London: Wisconsin Press.
- Kruger, R. A., & Casey, M.A.(2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand oaks, CA: sage
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews- An introduction to qualitative research interviewing* sage publication.
- Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009).*Interviews: learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* sage publication California

- Kyalo, P.(2012). A Reflection on the African traditional values of marriage and sexuality: international journal of Academic Research in progressive Education and Development.
- Maxwell, A. (1996). Qualitative research design: An interactive Approach, sag publications.
- McErlean, K. (2015). Examining conceptions of singledom among older ever single: College of Agriculture and Life Sciences: Social Sciences of Cornell University Thesis.
- Meier, A., Hull, K. E., & Ortyl, T. A. (2009). Young adult relationship values at the intersection of gender and sexuality. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71, 510-525. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00616.x
- Mensch, B.S., Singh, S. & Casterine, J.B. (2005). Trends in the Timing of first marriage among men and women in the developing world. New York. U.S.A: Population Council INC.
- Meron, k. (2017). Psycho-Social impacts of traditional marriage on women in Wolaita, kindo Didaye Woreda. Unpublished MA Thesis In Social work. Addis Ababa University.
- Milestone, K., & Meyer, A. (2012). *Gender and popular culture*. Cambridge, UK: Polity
- Mitchll, C. A .(2014). The experience, challenges and coping resource of working wives and stay at home husbands: A social work perspective. Thesis
- Morris, W. L., Sinclair, S., & DePaulo, B. M. (2007). No shelter for singles: The perceived legitimacy of marital status discrimination. *Group processes and Intergroup Relations*
- Nagle, B. & Williams, N. (2008). Methodology Brief: introduction to focus groups. Center for assessment, planning and accountability.
- Nelson, D.L & Quick, J.C.(1997). Organizational behavior; New York: west publishing company.
- Nimisha, B.(2013). Perception of single women towards marriage, carrier and education. Lovely professional universities: Punjab, India.
- Nowbi, P.C.(1997). Marriage and family counseling. Engu: Pan African publisher.
- Ntomio, L.F & Isiugo, C.U. (2011). Determinants and consequences of spinsterhood in Lagos, Department of Sociology: University of Ibadan. Nigeria. <http://Uaps2011.princeton.edu/papers/110028>.
- Pan, A. (2004). Why being single? A research for the delayed marriage among people (Aged 25-35) in Shanghi China. Lund university center for east & south Asia studies.
- Pankhurst, A. (2017). Change and Transformation in twenty rural communities in Ethiopia selected aspects and implications for policy. Addis Ababa Ethiopia.

- Pankhurst, H. (1990). *Gender, Development and identity: An Ethiopian study*
- Pankhurst, H. (1992). *Gender, development and identity: An Ethiopian study*. Zed books; London.
- Pereira, C. (2014). *Changing narrative of sexuality: contestations, compliance, and women's empowerment*. Zed books London & New York.
- Pickens, J.(2005) *perception and attitudes of individuals: organizational behavior in health care*. New York.
- Poortman, A. R., & Liefbroer, A. C. (2010). Singles' relational attitudes in a time of individualization. *Social Science Research*, 39, 938-949. doi: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2010.03.012
- Raley, R.K, & Bratter, J. (2004). "not even if you were the last man on earth: How marital constraints affect the likelihood of marriage." *Journal of Family Psychology*.
- Rebeca, T. (2016). *All the single ladies: unmarried women and the rise of independent nation*. Article.
- Reynolds, J & Wetherell, M. (2003). The discursive climate of singleness: the consequence for women's negotiation of a single identity. *Feminism and psychology*.
- Roseneil, S., & Budgeon, S. (2004). Cultures of intimacy and care beyond the family: Personal life and social change in the early 21st century. *Current Sociology*, 52, 135-139. doi:10.1177/0011392104041798
- Santi, L.L. (1988). 'The Demographic Context of Recent Change in the Structure of American Households', *Demography*, 25, 4, Nov, pp. 509-519.
- Sharp, E.& Ganong, L.(2007). Living in the gray: women's experiences of missing the marital Transitions. *Journal of marriage and family*.
- Sharp, E.& Ganong, L.(2007). "I'm a loser, I'm not married, let's just all look at me": ever-single women's perceptions of their social environment. *Journal of family issues* 32(7) 956-980 DOI: 10.1177/0192513X10392537
- Singerman, D. (20007). *The economic imperatives of marriage: emerging practices and identities among youth in the Middle East*. Youth initiative working paper: Dubai school of government.

- Situmorang, A. (2007). Staying single in a married world, *Asian population studies*, 3:3,287-304, DOI: 10.1080/17441730701746433
- Smith, J., Flowers, P., Larkin, M (2009) interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Theory, method & research*. LA, sag
- Stutzer, A., & Frey, S. B. (2004). Does marriage make people happy, or do happy people get married? *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 35, 326-347. doi: 0.1016/j.socec.2005.11.043
- Tannen, D. (1990). *You just do not understand: women and men in conversation*. New York.
- Ubesekeera D.M. & Jiaojiang L. (2008). *Marriage & family life Satisfaction: Sabaragmua university journal*.
- UNICEF.(2016). *State of the world's children*
- Van D. W. (2015). *Women's experience of being single*. Thesis in Art and Social science. Department of Psychology. Stellenbosch University.
- Wambui, J. (2013). *An introduction to feminist research*. University of Nairobi Journal.
- White, A.M. (2010). *African Americans doing feminism Putting theory into everyday practice*. State university of New York press, Albany, NY. www.sunnypress.edu
- Wimalasena, N. A. (2016). *An analytical study of definition of the term marriage*. *International journal of Humanities and Social Science*.
- Wright, T.L. (1996). *Exploring the in-depth interview as a qualitative research technique with American and Japanese firms, marketing intelligence & planning*. Vol 14, pp55-64, <http://Doi.org/10.1108102634509610182913>

Annex

Annex 1: an individual in-depth interview and FGD Guide

Section 1: Informant's background

1. Age
2. Education
3. Occupation
4. Religion
5. ethnicity

Section 2: unmarried women's understanding and experience of being single

1. What does being single mean to you?

2. Why are you single?
3. Do families and friends ask you why you are still single?
 - describe when this question is most often asked?
4. What do you feel about being single?
 - can you describe these feelings
 - Have you ever felt that you are incomplete because you don't have a husband?
 - Can you describe these feeling?
 - -when do these feelings most occur
 - What factor contributes to these feelings like psychological challenges and /or challenges posed by family, friends?
5. What does the expectation of others (family, friends, etc...) make you feel?
 - Describe these feelings?
 - When do these feelings most occur?
6. Do people expect you to provide justification for your single status?
7. Do you ever feel judged for being a single woman?
8. Have you ever received comments about your single status?/ do family and friends commented on your single status?
 - Describe these comments?
 - Are there specific occasions they are frequently commented?/ when do they frequently commented?
 - What do you feel when people reacted or commented negatively on your single status?
9. Are you fulfilled with your life as a single woman?

- If you were married would your life be more fulfilling?
10. Have you ever been pressured to marry?
 - Describe what the pressure looked like?
 - How do you cope with this internal and external pressure to marry?
 11. Do you have a future plan to marry?
 12. At what age did you think you will get married when you were a child?
 13. At what age do you think it is appropriate for a woman to get married?
 14. Have you ever discriminated because you are not married?
 - Describe your feelings about this?
 15. Have you ever face/encounter any problems because you are single?
 - Describe when you face these problems at most (work, social gatherings, etc...)
 16. What do you think the most challenging part of being single?
 17. How do you cope with the challenges of being unmarried?