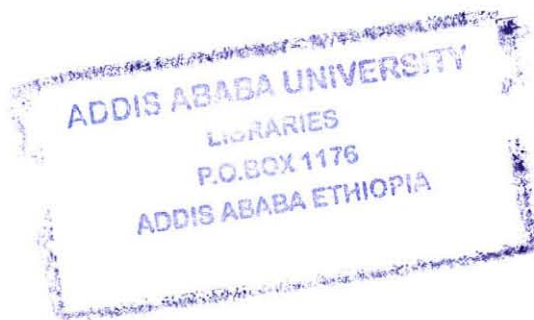


**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**CHILD MARRIAGE IN DEMBIA WOREDA OF NORTH GONDAR**

By  
Belay Zelleke



Date - July 2, 2008

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**By  
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**A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of Masters of Arts in  
Counseling Psychology.**

**Date: July2, 2008**

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**i**

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## Acronyms

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ACRWC----- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

CEDAW-- ----Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination  
against Women

CRC----- The Convention on the Rights of the Child

DHS-----Demographic and Health Survey

EGLDAM--- Ye Ethiopia Goji Limadawi Dirgitoch Aswogaj Mahiber

IAC----- Inter-African Committee on Traditional practices Affecting the  
health of Women and Children

MICS----- Multiple indicator cluster Survey

STI-----Sexually transmitted infections

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**ABSTRACT**

Regardless of the law which prohibits child marriage, many female children are being wedded in Dembia Woreda of North Gondar. The practice of child marriage is unchecked and children have become victims of the tradition.

The objective of this study was to assess the magnitude of the problem of child marriage in Dembia Woreda, to understand the underlying reasons, to identify the perceived benefits of child marriage, to look into the consequences and /or impact of the child marriage and suggest solutions.

The study used both qualitative and quantitative instruments to collect the data. The qualitative data are complemented by the quantitative data or vice versa during analysis.

The prevalence of child marriage in Dembia Woreda is 30%. Various reasons are provided for concluding child marriage. Among the many underlying reasons, the desire to gain social prestige/recognition (38%), the need to conform to the social norm (33%), the desire for the establishment of bond between families of the bride and groom (21%), the desire to increase family members (33%) and to enjoy the wedding ceremony (39%) are the top ones.

Child marriage has benefits to the parents of the spouses. The consequence and/or impact of child marriage are diverse and negative. The female child suffers from incompatible physical, social and psychological problems.

Enhancing the participation of female children and women at school and Kebele levels of the Woreda, the provision of child rights education, the provision of equal access to education and absence of gender discrimination are suggested as solutions to eliminate the problem of child marriage from the Woreda.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**INTRODUCTION**

**1.1. Background to the Problem**

Every child needs assistances from his /her parents in order to grow and develop normally. It needs inputs from kin groups, neighborhood, community and the state to find his/her place in the society. Home is everything for the child. All his/ her physical, emotional and social needs are satisfied in the home. The problem of personality development begins when the need of the child is not adequately met at home and in the community (Aggrawal, 1994).

Home environment generally refers to the family atmosphere manifested in the form of the belief system and parenting style. Where there is peace, love, acceptance and understanding the chance for smooth growth and development is high. But this is not always true. All families do not understand the needs of their children; they become restrictive and controlling. As a result they end up being abusive parents (Kale, 1978).

In any society, the cultural values determine the belief system of the family. What is more or less valued in the society is well understood by any family. The family acquires the values from the belief system of the society. One of the culturally valued beliefs in Southern Asia, Middle East and North Africa is the practice of child marriage (UNFPA, 2005). Child marriage is a very serious harmful traditional practice which jeopardizes the lives of millions of children all over the world (Plan, 2004).

Realizing the multifaceted problems of children the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted by the United Nations in 1989, spells out the basic human rights to which children every where are entitled: the right to survival; the right to development of their full physical and mental potential; the right to protection from influences that are harmful to their development; and the right to participation in family, cultural and social life (UNICEF, 996).

Likewise, the Declaration on the Right and Welfare of the African Child adopted by the assembly of heads of states and Governments of the Organization of African Unity, at its 16<sup>th</sup> ordinary session in Monrovia, Liberia from 17 to 20, July 1979, recognized the need to take appropriate measures to promote and protect the rights and welfare of the African child (Child-Link, 2003).

Efforts are exerted to mitigate the problem and ensure the protection of the rights of female children; but child marriage remains as an issue of great concern in many countries of the world. As there are cultural and traditional practices which must be encouraged to continue, there are also harmful traditional practices which seek immediate attention. Thousands of children are suffering from the scourges of poverty, economic crises, hunger, homelessness, diseases, illiteracy, and lack of clean water, inadequate sanitation, child marriage, child battering, abandonment, exploitation (ABSTRACT BOOK, 1992).

Child marriage is a violation of rights. The magnitude of the problem is high in some countries of South East Asia, and North Africa (UNICEF 2005). It is widely practiced in Ethiopia too, particularly in the central and northern part of the country (NCTPE, 2000). Child marriage is a social problem which needs proper attention to ensure the normal personality development of the female children who are being wedded as early as 6 and 7 years (NTCPE, 2000).

In Dembia Woreda of north Gondar zone, where the study is conducted, not only children but babies are wedded. It is called *Yankelba gabicha*. This means that children become brides and bridegrooms while they are still being carried on the backs of their mothers). Why people adhere to this practice and make it part of their culture is not fully explored. Even though some people admit that the frequency of child marriage has decreased in the Woreda due to the pressure imposed on from the government and other concerned bodies, the tradition are still strongly accepted by the society.

As the researcher frequently visited Dembia to carry out some tasks, he saw many children in their early years betrothed. Even, he had the opportunity to see small female children

wedded. These incidences were surprising to him. He discussed the issue of child marriage with some people from of the Woreda and became well informed about it.

In some of the schools the researcher visited to undertake other tasks, students raised the issue of child marriage in many forums and asked about it in relation to the rights of the child. Moreover, the practice of *Yankeliba gabicha* in the Woreda drew the attention of the researcher. The fate of female children and the wrong perception of the adult population about child marriage initiated the researcher to undertake this study. He tried to find any study conducted in the area on the issue of child marriage and found none. This was the other main reason which motivated him to carry out the study. The findings of this study may serve as a spring board for further study about the issue child marriage in the Woreda.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Every culture in the world puts pressure on children to conform to a set of standards that are difficult for them to meet. According to (Halford,2004), these set of standards range from traditional moral codes that are strictly enforced by parents, religious leaders or society at large to peer- group pressure. Social expectations put a lot of pressure on female children. In the northern part of Ethiopia, female children experience restrictions beginning very early in their lives.

Specifically, female children in the northern part of Ethiopia are expected to marry at their early ages. As a result, many female children are victims of child marriage. Child marriage implies that female children are forced to play the role of grown-up women. These children are expected to establish sexual contact with their husbands. They give birth while they are still children (Mesfin& Teferra, 2000). Male children marry when they are sexually matured and ready for sexual intercourse. This may be possible after the age of 16.

Child marriage, which is a serious problem for female children, takes away childhood and the opportunity for personal development, and leads to a repressed and insecure existence. Child marriage denies children their rights to education which is needed for their personal development, preparation for adulthood and their necessary contribution to the future well-being of their families and society (Pathfinder, 2006).

Child marriage is conducted without the free will and informed consent of the bride and bridegroom. According to the study conducted by the Amhara Women Lawyers Association (1999), 91.1% of the women interviewed confirmed that a girl does not have the right to decide when and whom to marry. A girl is expected to fulfill the will of her parents. According to the same study, parents believe that a girl is not capable enough to think for herself; as a result it should be taken care of by her parents.

Childhood is a period of development. Children develop physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, morally, etc. They grow and develop in sequences. Development of proper attitudes, habits and patterns of behavior formed during the childhood period particularly in the early years determine to a great extent how successfully an individual will adjust Himself/ herself as he/ she grows older (Aggrawal, 1994).

Among the Christian and Muslim communities of central and northern Ethiopia, the prevalence of child marriage is high. It is a parent-centered marriage arrangement made between two families of different lineage without the knowledge and approval of the concerned couple (NCTPE, 2000). Female children are wedded as early as 7-8 years of age. The female child is given to the husband at an early age when she is not physically and psychologically ready for married life. The physical, psychological and social consequences are serious and damaging to the bride. The law of the country penalizes parents or other individuals who are practicing child marriage. The Revised Criminal Code Article 648 and the Revised Family Code Article 7(1) prohibit child marriage.

However, the mere presence of the law alone can not be a solution to the problem. Effective implementation of the law is mandatory.

The problem of child marriage and *Yankelba Gabicha* are very serious social problems in Dembia Woreda of North Gondar zone. Why the community gives high value to *yankeliba gabicha* may be perceived in economic and social terms. It is also equally important to take into account the health related consequences of child marriage. The negative effects of child marriage will undoubtedly outbalance the advantages related to it if properly investigated. Some times, society pursues traditional practice without perceiving the harmful effects it causes.

Child marriage has negative economic, social and health consequences (TREG, 2006). Child marriage is also a violation of the rights of women and children (Broken Bodies-Broken Dreams, 2006). It is, therefore, necessary to look into the problem critically relating it to the international conventions and national laws and to suggest feasible solutions to the problem.

### **1.3 Operational Definitions**

The definition of "**Child**" is based on the definition provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989), the African Charter for the Right and Welfare of the Child (1999) and the Revised Family Code (2000). Any person who is below the age of 18 is called a **child**. Likewise, any marriage concluded before a child reaches the age of 18 is called "**Child marriage**".

*Yankeliba gabicha*: - It is a marriage concluded when the female child is below the age of two. The male child could be as old as ten years old. The female child concludes marriage before she starts to talk or walk. Parents arrange such type of marriages with the intention of forging relationship with wealthy and respected families and for other reasons which are beneficial to the parents of the spouses.

### **1.4. Objectives**

The general objective of the study is to assess the magnitude of the problem of child marriage, the reasons, and the consequences and/or impact, the perceived advantages to the spouses, their parents and families in Dembia Woreda of North Gondar zone.

The specific objectives of the study are:-

1. To describe the prevalence of child marriage in Dembia Woreda of North Gondar
2. To identify the underlying reasons of child marriage in the same Woreda.
3. To explore the perceived advantages of child marriage in the Woreda.
4. To explain the consequences and identify the impact of child marriage in the lives of the bride and groom and suggest possible solutions to Alleviate the problem.

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

It is obvious that all efforts toward nation building require to a great extent appropriate growth and development of children. Conducive cultural, social and physical environments contribute to a great extent to children's wholesome personality development. Therefore, it is important to identify problems which deter the normal growth and development of children through research and propose appropriate solution to the problem. To this effect the significance of the study of child marriage in Dembia Woreda of North Gondar lies in the fact that it would indicate the magnitude and the reasons for child marriage in the woreda.

Child marriage is a violation of human rights and this violation of the rights of children can be addressed effectively when there is adequate information about the problem. In addition to the prevalence and reasons of the problem, it tries to explore the perceived advantages, the consequences and the impacts so that appropriate measures can be taken on the basis of the findings. Furthermore, the results of the study encourage others to conduct further study on the problem

### **1.6. The scope of the study**

The study is limited only in Dembia woreda of North Gondar zone. Time and budget constraints do not allow this study to widen its scope. The samples are also limited because of the same constraints.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **2.1 Marriage**

According to the view of Anthropologists, marriage means the creation of new social relations, not only between husband and wife but also between kin groups of both sides (Smelser et al, 2001).

According to Tilahun (2005), "marriage is a voluntary union of a man and a woman to share the burdens of life, to found a family, and to shoulder the individual and social responsibilities arising there from".

Henry Campbell Black's dictionary define marriage as "the legal status, conditions or relation of one man and one woman permanently united in law for the discharge to each other and the community of the duties legally incumbent on those whose association is found on the distinction of sex".

Since marriage is a relationship in which two individuals (a male and female) make a legal commitment or pledge to love and care to each other (Meeks et al, 1998), it has to be conducted with the full consent of the spouses. This is clearly stated in Article 34 of the Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopia constitution (1995).

Smelter and Baltes (2001) point out that marriage improves the economic well being of the couples. The earnings of wives add to family income, provide insurance against the risk of economic shortfall, and allow families to adjust incomes and make changes as the economic needs arise, as children are born and grow. This solicits the freedom to make choices about relationship and marriage. In some societies, however, parents choose when and whom their daughters should marry.

In a married life, as there is mutually satisfying relationship, there is also conflict between couples. When freedom of choice "whom to marry" is curtailed and the marriage is concluded by the sole will of the parents of the spouses, the relationship may not be satisfying. In a satisfying relationship, couples are happy; they express low rates of psychological distress and greater resistance to the detrimental effects of negative life events. They support each other, have good communication, show positive day to day behavior, manifest positive biases in perception of the partner etc. The opposite is true in couples where the relationship is dissatisfying (Smelser et al, 2001). If a marriage is to be successful, one has to select his/ her mate.

Marriage is a long standing practice all over the world, between opposite sexes called husband and wife, who are destined to live together, have sexual relationship, share economic resources and shoulder the burden of parenthood. As a whole, marriage is one of society's most important and basic institutions (NTCPE, 2006)

In different parts of the world, there are many types of marriages which reflect the diversity of social institutions (TREG consult private limited company, 2006). These types of marriages are Religious marriage, customary marriage and Registration marriage (The Revised Family, 2000). Couples can conclude marriage following the rites of one of these kinds of marriage, since they are effective and recognized in almost all societies of the world. In Africa, where families know one another, marriage take place in the form of either through parental promise for one another while the would be spouses are infants or through exercising their parental rights to select the future partner of their son. The parents of the son send community elders to the parents of the female child for their consent (Broken Bodies-Broken Dreams 2006). However, due to the effect of industrialization and the introduction of wage labor, the pressure of kin groups, especially parents is decreasing in urban centers. Intimacy, emotional satisfaction and personal fulfillment are emphasized as both the rationale and the criteria for the success marriage (TREG consult 2005).

## **2.2 Child Marriage in the world**

All over the world, marriage is a challenge to persons under the age of 18. Child marriage refers to both formal marriages and informal unions in which a girl lives with a partner as if married before the age of 18. Array of international instruments including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and others advocate for the rights of children to be protected from any form of harmful traditional practices.

Most of the States of the world are signatories to the International laws. The rights of children are protected in other human rights instruments. For instance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) demand the full and free consent of the spouses of full age to conclude marriage. Child marriages are against the convention on consent to marriage, minimum age for marriage and registration of marriages which require that spouses be of full age and give their full and free consent and that the marriage is officially registered. The other International agreement which protects the rights of the female child is the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery. It prohibits "Any institutions and practices whereby.... a woman, without the right to refuse, is promised or given in marriage on payment of a consideration in money or in kind to her parents, guardian, family or any other person or group" (NTCPE, 2003). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights which came into force in 1948 states in Article 16 that men and women of full age... have the right to marry and found a family. They are entitled to equal rights to marriage, during marriage and its dissolution. On the other hand, The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child stipulates in Article 21 that child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective action including legislation, shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years. Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, states that in all actions concerning children... the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. Despite all these protective legal instruments, female children are wedded before they reached the age of

maturity. Over 60 million women aged 20-24 were married or in union before the age of 18 According to the estimation of UNICEF (1987-2005).

In many countries of North Africa, East Asia, Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean female children are often forced to marry at their early years to men who are considerably older, while male children are not encouraged to marry in their adolescence period. The right to "free and full" consent to marriage is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights -with the recognition that consent can not be "free and full" when one of the parties involved is not sufficiently mature to make an informed decision about a life partner. However, female children as old as seven and eight years are forced to marry. This is a common practice in the northern part of Ethiopia.

The number of female children who enter into marriage varies each year across regions and countries. Child marriage is influenced by many factors. The state of the country's civil registration system which provides proof of age for children; the existence of an adequate legislative framework with an accompanying enforcement mechanism to address cases of child marriage and the existence of customary or religious laws that condone the practice are the major factors (UNICEF 2005). As the data gathered by UNICEF in the same year indicated, among women aged 15-24, 48% were married before the age of 18 in South Asia, 42% in Africa and 29 % in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Child marriage occurs more frequently in rural settings than in urban areas. 63% of rural girls were married before the age of 18 compared to 22% of urban girls (DHS, Burkina Faso, 2003).

According to the estimate of UNICEF (DHS 2000), girls living in the poorest 20% of households are more likely to get married at an early age than those living in the wealthiest 20%. In Peru 45% of women were married by age 18 among the poorest 20%, compared to 5% among the richest 20%.

As to the role of education UNICEF (DHS 1999) estimated that Women with primary education are significantly less likely to be married as children than those who received no

education. In Zimbabwe, 48 % of women who had attended primary school had been married by the age of 18, compared to 87% of those who had not attended school.

Child marriage is also associated with fertility. According to the estimate of UNICEF (DHS 2000), 1% of women with no children, 35% of women with one or two children, 72% of women with 3 or 4 children and 87% of women with 5 or more children were married by the age of 18 in Colombia.

According to UNFPA (2006), in 11 countries more than 50% of women were married before the age of 18. The countries with the highest rates of marriage are Niger 76%, Chad 71.5%, Bangladesh 68.7%, Mali 65.4%, Guinea 64.5%, Central Africa Republic 57%, Nepal 56.1%, Mozambique 55.9%, Uganda 54% , Burkina Faso 51.9% and India 50%. The same toolkit estimated the number of female children all over the world who are going to marry before reaching the age of 18 to be 100 million in the next decade.

In countries like Egypt, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and the Middle East, female children are restricted of movement. They are always under the surveillance of their parents and relatives until they are married. Since child marriage is a deep rooted traditional practice, it has become impossible for the girls to break free from marrying at early ages (UNICEF 2001). They do not receive support from their families or others concerned to say no to marriage.

In Afghanistan, it is believed that between 60% and 80% of the marriages are child marriages which are concluded forcibly. (<http://arrangedmarriages.htm>). The legal age of marriage in Egypt is 16, and in India 18, but these laws are quite often ignored. The issue of child marriage has also reached in countries like England and the United States of America where secret illegal marriages are being concluded ([http://marriage about com](http://marriageabout.com)). According to " Child marriage Fact sheet" a report issued by the united Nations, these early marriage unions violate the basic human rights of the girls by putting them into a life of isolation, servitude, ignorance with health problems and abuse. Child marriage can be taken as a global social problem which deserves immediate solution (UNFPA, 2005).

Grooming for domestic roles deprives millions of girls of their right to an education. Education is a noticeable area where female children suffer disproportionately to male children. In many countries, parents are unwilling to spend as much on girl's education as

on boys. Examples how girls are discriminated against in the field of education is countless. In Sudan for instance, the ratio of male-to-female adult literacy is 28%. The comparable ratios are 32% in Burkina Faso and 35% in Sierra Leone. In Niger, only 15% of girls are literate while in Chad, for every 100 boys receiving a secondary education there are only 31 girls (UNICEF, 2002). However, better educated and healthier mothers are much more likely to have stronger and better cared for and educated children and are much less likely to end up or remain in poverty.

### 2. 3. Kinds of Child Marriage in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, there are practices which are beneficial to the maintenance and perpetuation of society. On the contrary, there are also other practices which affect the livelihood and well-being of the population particularly women and children. Child marriage is one of the severest harmful traditional practices which affect the well-being of female children in most of the societies of the country.

Kinds of marriages according to Tilahun (2005) are:-

**Promissory marriage:** - This is an oral agreement reached between two families to give their children in marriage to each other before or after the birth of the children.

**Child marriage:** - Girls under the age of 10 are introduced to wifedom under the guidance of parents in-law until they reach puberty. It is called "Madego" in Amharic.

**Early adolescent marriage:** - marriage concluded between the age of 10 and 14. It is the most common age of marriage for the majority of rural girls.

**Adolescent marriage:** - This marriage takes place when the female child is 15 years old.

**Late adolescent marriage:** - Is the marriage concluded after the age of 15. The late marriage for boys is taken to be after the age of 20 (As a whole, all the above mentioned kinds of marriages are child marriages, because all the marriages are concluded before the female child reaches the age of 18.

However, there is a kind of marriage which is similar to promissory marriage called *Yankeliba gabicha*. According to the information provided by elders of the community of Dembia Woreda, *Yankelba gabicha* is a marriage concluded while the female child is on his/her mother's back. The male child's age can vary but not exceeding ten years. There are incidences where babies are wedded before they start to walk (marriage while on cradle

or crib). It differs from child marriage in that *Yanlelba gabicha* is an agreement between the parents of the spouses, with no major feasts and community involvement.

Due to the absence of birth (death, marriage and divorce) registration, there is no way of proving the age of a girl. The medical certificate provided by hospitals certifies the age of the bride child in age brackets. It does not tell the specific age of the child. This has given a chance for the parents of the female child to raise the age of the spouse to 18 or above to have legal ground for arranging the marriage.

#### **2.4. Child Marriage in Ethiopia**

The two major problems of Ethiopia are poverty and ignorance. Ethiopia is one of the least poverty stricken countries of the world, where 81% of its population live on less than US \$ 2 a day with a life expectancy of 49 years (world fact book, 2005). This situation does not seem to change much currently.

The majority of the Ethiopian population is illiterate. As a result of low awareness, many parents do not realize the importance of education. Even if they do understand the importance of education, the poor living conditions does not allow many parents to send their children to school. Lack of education restricts the girl's capacity to make her own choice in life. Educated women are less likely to allow their children to be married off. Children are considered as the economic assets to their parents. Not only denial of the right of education, child marriage isolates children from their peer networks, and leaves them more vulnerable to abuse within the marriage (NCTPE, 2006).

Children who refuse to marry or choose a partner not approved by their parents may be punished or cursed. Fear of violating the traditional norm of the locality has caused children to be submissive to the will of their parents (NCTPE, 2006).

According to UNFPA (2005), countries in Africa, Asia and Middle East that have high rates of child marriage are those with: high poverty, birth and death rates; greater incidence of conflict and civil strife and lower level of over all development, including schooling, employment and health care.

In their earlier adolescence periods female children are expected to acquire skills which help them to effectively practice the responsibilities of married lives. They have to select their mates, have the knowledge how to live with their husbands, start a family and manage home. But female children are wedded while they are still small and miss the opportunity of acquiring the necessary skills which make them efficient in managing their homes (Jenson and Thornton, 2003).

The Revised Family Code (2000) in Article 6 states that a valid marriage shall take place only when the spouses have given their free and full consent. The implementation of the law in its strictest sense is not given due attention by the duty bearers. As well, the introduction of the law to the people of the Woreda is not carried out properly. As a result it is common to see children wedded before attaining sexual maturity. The task of raising the awareness of the people on the harmful practice of child marriage on one hand, and proper execution of the law on the other hand, are indispensable to curb the violations of the rights of children and women. The harmful traditional beliefs of the people of the Woreda can be changed only through intensive and successive awareness raising activities to members of the community by conscious and trained government officials and other bodies including non-government actors.

According to a study conducted by NCTPE (2003), child marriage is a common practice all over Ethiopia. However, the magnitude of the problem is higher in the Amhara and Tigray regions when compared to other regions of the country. As the study indicated, the rate of early marriage in the Amhara region was 82%, in Tigray region 79%, in Benshanguel 64% in Gambella 64% and in the Afar region 46 %. Since the practice of early marriage is a long standing phenomenon, the seriousness of the problem in affecting the lives of the female population is unnoticed. The government officials who maintain order and law are responsible to change the attitude of the people and eliminate the practice. The understanding that the female population is half the force required in building the nation has to be implanted in the minds of concerned government officials.

There is a social consensus in the Amhara region that the girl shall be brought up together with her husband with out having any sexual contact, although they are made to sleep in the same bed. The husband swears in front of the elders of the community that he will not make any sexual contact with the girl for specified number of years, usually two or three

years until the girl is mature enough and ready for sexual intercourse. However, the oath is only a formality. The husband breaks the promise and perpetrates sexual intercourse (Belay,2003). This traditional practice is widely in use both in the Moslem and Christian communities of the central and northern part of the country, particularly in Tigray and the Amhara regions ( Mesfin & Teferra, 2000).

Diversified explanations are provided as to why society persistently adheres to the practice of child marriage. Among the explanations provided in support of child marriage are: securing daughter's virginity, securing child's future at an early age, conforming to tradition, competition among parents to find supportive in-laws, the need to have many grand children, getting fame out of the arranged marriage banquet, care of a male guardian and to avoid the possibility of a girl reaching an age where she is no longer desirable as a wife (qumo ker) are worth of mentioning (Mesfin and Tefera, 2000). However, these simulating justifications can not shadow the negative consequences of child marriage.

In reality, child marriage is an overwhelming problem for girls in Ethiopia. Child marriage means that many thousands of girls have to take on the role of adults - sex, pregnancy and motherhood, shouldering house hold responsibilities etc. It is a huge burden for a child who is still developing. It takes away childhood and other opportunity for personal development, and can lead to a repressed and insecure existence (Hal ford et al, 2004).

To wed a child is traditionally accepted in many parts of the country. A girl marries as early as 7or 8 years with out her consent to a man she does not know and who is much older than her. One of the findings of the study conducted by the National committee on Harmful Traditional Practices in Ethiopia (1997) indicates that little girls as young as 7 years are married to teenage boys with whom they grow up together. According to the findings of the same survey 22 % of the girls in S. Wollo and 30% the girls in W. Gojjam marry between the ages of 10-14. The average age preferred to conclude first marriage for the girl child in West Gojjam is 11.9, South Gondar12.7 and North Gondar 13.2. The average age for concluding first marriage in the Amhara region is 14.5.This shows that child marriage is a social problem in the region which demands immediate attention and coordinated effort from the law enforcing bodies and other actors of the Woreda to eliminate it.

Children are in the process of growth and development until they reach the age of 18. Regarding the physiological and psychological readiness for marriage, the accepted age is 18 in many countries of the world (CRC, 1989). In Dembia Woreda, child marriage takes place at ages much earlier than the legally accepted age one. As one study indicates child marriage is a very serious problem in Dembia, Ankasha and Awabel Woredas of the Amhara Regional State of Ethiopia (Mesfin and Tefera 2000).

When children are married, they face problems, like lack of house hold management, the problem of bearing many children, discontinuation of education and stressful living conditions. These situations ultimately lead to divorce. The health conditions of many married female children are also at risk (TREG consult, 2006).

The fate of the married female child is to share life with a man who is not of her choice. The intensive pressure to become pregnant coupled with no social support for her cause worsens her life. More over, the increased risk of maternal and infant mortality, restricted social mobility/freedom of movement, increased vulnerability to HIV and STI's and lack of the necessary skills for living (UNFPA, 2005). According to UNICEF (2005), Child marriage must be viewed within a context of force and coercion, involving pressure and emotional blackmail against children who lack the choice or capacity to give their full consent. A child who gives the consent of marriage being under the age of 18 can not simultaneously make an informed choice whether or not to marry.

Marriage is perceived differently by different people. Marriage to the bride, to her parents and the family or to the groom, to his parents and the family creates different images (Belay, 2001). For instance, the bride may perceive marriage as a means of acquiring social appreciation or as a start up for womanhood life or as an assurance to avoid derogatory remarks connected to marriage. As to her parents and the family, it may be seen in terms of social prestige, labor support from the presumed husband, assurance for not to bear a child out of wedlock, regaining of the money paid for other marriage rites. On the contrary, the groom may feel proud of his adulthood status. He becomes source of pride and social approval for his parents. The familial link becomes source of obtaining assistances in time of needs (Belay, 2001).

As the study conducted under the sponsorship of Path Finder international (2006) in the Amhara region, the finding indicates that 60% urban and 70% rural ever married women got married before the age of 18 years. The majority of the women (54%) entered into marriage as a result of some one's pressure. and more than 80% of the marriages were arranged by parents.

## **2.5 Impacts of Child marriage**

Child marriage is not only violation of rights but also a health problem. Many married female children have become victims to fistula problem (NCTPE, 2000). A fistula hospital was built in 1971 in Addis Ababa, but the magnitude of the problem has urged to build another hospital at Bahirdar. The hospital located at Addis Ababa operates approximately 120 patients yearly. Only those who manage to find transport to the hospital are probably a small portion of the young women needing treatment (archive for September, 2006). In order to alleviate the problem of transportation, another Fistula hospital is built in Bahirdar. The problem of fistula brings social isolation and psychological problems. Girls with fistula suffer incontinence and face bleak future. Even after treatment, the psychological and physical problems can persist.

Save the children (2004) estimates that 70,000 adolescent mothers die every year in developing world because young girls are having children before they are physically ready for parent hood. The physical risks of adolescent child bearing include toxemia, hemorrhage, anemia, infection and obstructed labor (Hal ford etal, 2004).

The other impact is the denial of childhood and childhood education. Deprivation of the rights and benefits of the girl such as restriction of personal freedom and deprivation of opportunities for personality development are negative impacts encountering the married female child. A child made to marry without her consent is unhappy and isolated (Tilahun, 2006).

The problem of premature pregnancy which causes higher rates of maternal and infant mortality and the problem of vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS are rife among married children. (UNICEF, website on married adolescents).

Abusive measures for not conforming to the interests of parents and the expectation to make the married female child a submissive wife and mother are among the impacts which harm married children seriously.

## **2.6 Child marriage in Dembia Woreda of North Gondar**

In Dembia and partly in Gondar Zuria Woredas, apart from concluding the usual child marriage, babies are also wedded. The magnitude of the problem is unknown. According to the explanation of the elders of the Woreda, parents of both spouses agree to conclude *yankeliba gabicha* with out involving other people from the community. Only the families of the bride and groom celebrate the marriage with minor feasts. Occasionally, parents of the bride and the groom invite each other's family and strengthened family relationship. While concluding *Yankeliba gabicha*, the marriage is officially declared and parents of both sides contribute livestock and/or plot of land as a start up capital for the future married lives of the bride and the groom. The start up capital is often put in the hands of the groom's parent. However, according to some persons of the Woreda, there are occasions where the parents of the groom consume the dowry and end up in conflict. Even though rare, there are occasions where the parents of the bride go to court for verdict.

Why the community encourages child marriage is ascribed as informed from the dwellers of the Woreda orally, as the need for social prestige, gaining of financial benefits, relieving of economic burden from the family, to conform to traditions etc.

In spite of the existing law and regulations which banned child marriage, the problem is not under control. Due to the marriage concluded, children are exposed to hazardous environmental conditions. The physiological, psychological and social conditions of children are negatively affected (Pathfinder, 2006), because their rights are violated or abused. The society is unaware of the physiological and psychological impact child marriage causes upon children. Perhaps, if the adult society distinctly comes to envisage its disadvantages, the practice may be condemned and people may cooperate in taking legal actions against the culprits, since marriage under the age of 18 is subject to penalty according to the revised Criminal Code (2005) of the country and other legal entities.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The instruments selected and used were key informant in depth interview, focus group discussion, questionnaire, case history and secondary data. The study is cross-sectional in its design.

#### **3.1 The Research Site**

In general, child marriage is practiced in the central and northern highlands of Ethiopia. According to available studies child marriage seems to be more serious in the Amhara National Regional State. Why society adhered to the practice of child marriage is not fully explored. The social, economic and cultural values attached to the traditional practice of child marriage are not adequately investigated. Many female children are denied of their rights. The burden of household management, stressful working conditions, maternal morbidity and mortality and other unfavorable conditions have become the lot of female children in areas where child marriage is practiced.

The Woreda selected for the study of child marriage is Dembia. There are about 46 kebeles in Dembia woreda. Four kebeles were randomly selected for the study. All the participants of the study were from these four kebeles. Two of the selected kebeles are in the town of koladiba, the other one is in the town of chuwahit and the fourth kebele is Girarge which is located along the road to Gondar from koladiba.

Except in Dembia and partly in the adjacent Woreda, which is Gondar Zuria Woreda, “*Yankelba Gabicha*” is not prevalent in the region. In addition to the practice of child marriage, why the people of Dembia Woreda is concluding *yankeliba gabicha* is not clearly understood. The interest of knowing about the specific rites of “*Yankeliba gabicha*” and child marriage in the Woreda drew the attention of the researcher to select the woreda purposely and undertake the study. Moreover, there is no any other study conducted on the issue of child marriage or *Yankeliba gabicha* in Dembia Woreda. The belief that this study may initiate other researchers to undertake studies on the issue encouraged the researcher to conduct the study.

### 3.2 Sample and sampling techniques

The study covers only Dembia Woreda in North Gondar zone. The samples of the study are:-

- Knowledgeable woreda personnel from the ministry of Justice, Education, Women Affairs, and police.
- School teachers and students
- Parents, religions leaders, community leaders or elders and Kebele administrators and NGO worker.

Both random and purposive sampling techniques were employed. The key informants were purposely selected, because it was believed that they knew more about the situation of child marriage of the Woreda. Recommended Individuals who were knowledgeable about the issue were directly contacted by the researcher and interviewed .The other samples were provided equal chances to be selected and 10% of the samples were taken randomly from the whole population. All the key informants were selected from the town of koladiba, which is the town of the woreda. The responsible duty bearers of the Woreda are assigned in the different government offices located in Koladiba.

The sample schools were also selected from the four kebeles already selected. Two schools were from the town of koladiba (one primary and one high school), one primary school from Chuwahit town and one primary school from the kebele located in Girarge. 120 students and 40 teachers filled the questionnaires. Representatives for the focus group discussions were selected from the town of koladiba and sample schools located in Koladiba.

## Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

In this section of the study, a summarized account of the major characteristics of the respondents Covered by the study will be presented.

### Characteristics of Sample Respondents

Table 1

No. of Respondents	Sex		Age								Education		Marital Status						Religion	
	M	F	Total	0-9	10-18	19-27	28-36	37-45	46 and above	literate	illiterate	Male			Female			Christian	muslim	
1 In depth interview	8	2	10	-	-	1	6	1	2	10	-	6	2	-	1	1	-	10	-	

	w																				
2	F.G.D.	6	22	28	-	13	4	-	5	6	28	-	6	2	-	5	5	10	27		1
3	Questionnaire	48	112	160	-	126	18	12	3	1	160	-	19	29	-	12	77	23	160		-
4	Case History	-	3	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3		
	Total	62	139	201	-	142	23	18	9	9	201	-	31	33	-	18	83	36	201		1
	Percentage	30	70	100		70	11	9	5	5	100	-	15	16	-	11	41	18	100		1

### **3.3. Tools for Data Collections**

#### **Qualitative Data Collection Technique**

##### ***Key informant for the in depth interview***

A guide for the key informant was developed and employed. Interviewees were purposely selected for their knowledge and work experiences related to the problem of child marriage.

The key informants were:- the woreda police inspector, woreda prosecutor, woreda court Judge, an expert form the woreda women affairs office, NGO worker in the woreda, a primary school teacher, woreda education office supervisor, kebele administrator, religious leader and community leader.

The thematic issues raised during the interview were the following:-

- Prevalence of child marriage and the attitude of the people in the woreda
- Reasons why child marriage is arranged by the people of the woreda and the execution of the law pertaining to child marriage.
- The benefits/perceived advantage/ gained through the arrangement of child marriage and “ *Yankeliba Gabicha*”/ Marriage before toddling or baby marriage/
- The consequences of child marriage and solutions to the problem.

##### ***Focus group discussions***

A guide for the focus group discussions was developed to draw ample information about the issue of the study. The necessary arrangements to conduct the discussions were made prior to the beginning of the discussions.

In each focus group discussion, the consent of the participants was ensured.

Participants of the focus groups discussions were female parents, male parents, married female adolescents and unmarried female students. The students were drawn from the primary and high schools of the town of koladiba.

### ***Case History***

Voluntary married students were selected and requested to impart their marriage life experiences. They were solicited to impart information why and how they accepted the marriage, the problems encountered after marriage, their attitude toward child marriage and the advantages and disadvantages of child marriage. The married respondents were high school female students.

### ***Secondary Data***

The available relevant data were gathered from the concerned offices of koladiba and compiled to back up the information collected through other instruments. The attempt made to collect information from the Fistula hospital of Bahirdar failed twice, because of lack of cooperation from the nurse responsible for the provision of the necessary data.

### **Quantitative data collection techniques**

#### ***Structured and unstructured questionnaire***

The samples selected to respond to the questionnaire comprised 40 teachers and 120 students. The respondents were randomly selected from four schools. The sample respondents duly filled the questionnaires and returned.

### **3.4. Procedures**

In order to gather the required data, it was necessary to recruit data collectors, a note taker and moderator. The recruitment was carried out at the town of Koladiba. They were trained for two days. The data collectors, note taker and moderator were six in number. They were carefully selected taking into account the experiences they had in collecting data. All the six individuals were persons who completed grade 12 in the past few years.

The 10 key informants were interviewed by the researcher. The data obtained from the key informants were collected and compiled based on the objectives of the study.

The data gathered from each focus group discussion were also organized after each discussion with the assistance of the note taker. Eventually, the organized notes of the four focus group discussions were compiled in accordance to the objectives of the study. The participants of the focus group discussions were 28. The male and female parents who participated in the focus group discussions were married, nine of the female students were divorced and seven of the students were never married.

The respondents of the questionnaire were 40 teachers and 120 students. The duly filled questionnaire was selected, tallied and tabulated.

The raw data collected were organized in line with the objectives of the study. Both qualitative and quantitative analytical procedures were used. To complement the findings obtained from the in depth interview of the key informants and focus group discussions, quantitative data were included. The secondary data was analyzed together with other data.

The 3 case histories were also rewritten in a comprehensive manner and included in the analysis.

The secondary data were collected from the office of Justice, office of education and Child Protection Unit of the Woreda Police station. The data were compiled and included in the analysis. The attempt made to gather information from Bahirdar fistula hospital was not successful.

Finally, all the data collected through the different instruments are arranged in a sequential manner based on the objectives of the study. In some cases, the quantitative data is analyzed separately, in other cases, all the data collected on each objective are analyzed together.

### **3.5. Method of Data Analysis**

The raw data collected were organized in line with the objectives of the study. Both qualitative and quantitative analytical procedures were used. To complement the findings obtained from the in depth interview of the key informants and focus group discussions, quantitative data are also included.

The results obtained from interviewing the key informants and focus group discussions are analyzed together or separately as found fit for the purpose. The quantitative data supplements the qualitative data or vice versa to understand the result clearly. Case histories and secondary data are included when ever necessary to support the data collected through the other instruments.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

In this chapter, findings of the study are presented, analyzed and interpreted.

#### **4.1 Prevalence of Child Marriage in Dembia Woreda**

As indicated in table 1, out of the 112 female children who responded to the questionnaire, 35 respondents are either married or divorced (12+ 23). This figure includes those children who were wedded through the ceremony of yankeliba *gabicha* (seven of the marriages are *Yankeliba gabicha*). Therefore, the prevalence of child marriage in Dembia Woreda is 31%.  $(35/112 \times 100=31)$

On the other hand, out of the ten key informants, six of them estimated the prevalence of child marriage in the Woreda to be 30%. One key informant estimated 40% while the other two estimated 25%. The 10<sup>th</sup> key informant estimated the prevalence to be 10%. According to them, the prevalence of child marriage is 28%.  $\{(180+40+50+10=280)/10=28\}$

In each focus group discussion, the issue of prevalence was debatable. Among the male parents, they reduced the prevalence as low as 25%. They believe that fear of the law has made many parents to refrain from concluding child marriage in the Woreda. Parents agreed that around 30 female children out of 100(30 %) are married yearly in their localities. The divorced female participants of the focus group discussion believed that the involvement of the court and the police have made the prevalence of child marriage reduced, however, according to them as many as 30% of the female children are married every year. The divorced female children who participated in the focus group discussion said that the prevalence of child marriage is not as before because of the active involvement of school children and others. Cases of child marriage are reported to the court and to the Police and this have made the frequency of child marriage

decreased. According to them, around 35% of the female children are married every year secretly or under different pretexts.

The overall prevalence of child marriage in the Woreda is 30% according to the cumulative data result obtained from the participants of the study.

#### 4.2 Reasons for the Arrangement of Child Marriages.

The reasons why the people of Dembia Woreda adhered to the harmful traditional practice of child marriage can be seen from different perspectives. The reasons provided by respondents for concluding child marriage in Dembia Woreda are stated in table 2 below.

##### Major reasons to conclude child marriage

Table 2

As to your opinion, why do families conclude child marriage? List down your reasons	Frequency	Percent (%)
To gain social prestige/recognition	61	38
To protect loss of virginity/Chastity	47	29
To create bond between families	34	21
To stop long running feud between families	23	18
The desire to increase family members	53	33
To enjoy the marriage ceremony	63	39
To enable spouses live and grow together	39	24
Lack of knowledge about its harmful effect	41	26
To gain material benefits	21	13
To ensure good Living for the child	26	16
The desire to get support	18	11
To ensure the continuity of tradition/	53	33

As shown in table 2, out of 160 respondents), 63(39%) of them believe that one of the reasons for the concluding of child marriage is the desire to enjoy the marriage ceremony/feast. The enjoyment of the marriage ceremony is eagerly anticipated by families and members of the

community. Likewise, 61(38%) of the respondents said that families or parents conclude child marriage to gain social prestige or recognition. The quality and quantity of the feast is highly valued by members of the community. In order to gain social prestige, parents prepare the feast of the marriage in abundance. 53 (33%) of the respondents said that one of the reasons for the arrangement of child marriage is the desire to increase the number of family members. Increased number of family is source of respect, security and labor. Since most of the work is done manually, the number of persons a family has determines the amount of production gained for living. The same numbers of respondents believe that child marriage is arranged because it is the tradition of the society. The other important factor for the arrangement of child marriage is to ensure chastity 47(29%). Chastity is highly valued by the society and the main reason for the conclusion of child marriage at a very early age is to ensure chastity/virginity. Low level of awareness and the desire of parents to ensure secured life for their child are also reasons which serve as pushing factors for the conclusion of child marriage in the Woreda of Dembia.

The key informants and participants of the focus group discussions on their parts have tried to list the reasons for concluding child marriage in the Woreda. Since the responses obtained from both the key informants and the participants of the focus group discussions are almost similar, the results are presented and analyzed together except in rare cases where major differences are observed.

**Social prestige:** - Gaining social respect is very important in the eyes of the members of the community. Parents do fear social rejection. Community criticizes parents who do not wed their children. The under mentioned sayings were raised during the focus group discussions held with male and female parents. "*Lemeem sar Yala ye*" /He who does not see green grass/" *Wog maireg Yalaye* "/He who does not enjoy the marriage of his child/ or "*Edejafu Shimel-Yemaykom*" / He who can not put a stick or a

cane at the side of his house's door/ are words of criticism against the parents who did not wed their children. These and similar words of criticism drive parents to marry off their children at early ages. Such social pressures are so pervasive that parents feel ostracized if they do not adhere to such social expectations, resulting in high prevalence of child marriage.

Fear of loss of appreciation from members of the community is a strong pushing factor for arranging child marriage as one key informant pointed out. In order to gain the appreciation of the community, parents of the spouses are expected to prepare food and drink in abundance. The desire to satisfy this social demand weakens the economic status of the parents of the spouses.

Out of the 10 key informants, seven of them mentioned the worth of chastity. This issue was also mentioned in the focus group discussions of both male and female parents and the divorced girls. As chastity is highly valued by the society of the Woreda, premarital pregnancy is also a taboo. The abduction of a female child is also a threat for parents. A mother in the focus group discussion said,

A pretty child is an asset. Parents ask to wed this pretty child to their son. As parents of the female child, the problem of selecting the right husband for their daughter is a challenge. If the request of a family is rejected, a conflict may arise and the threat of abduction may be high.

Fear of abduction limits the movement of the female child. Mostly, parents prefer to stop sending their child to school and wed her as early as possible to avoid the threat of abduction.

**Loss of virginity/chastity:** - According to the opinions of the key informants and the participants of the focus group discussions, parents believe that female children who are left to grow older are vulnerable to sexual attack or rape and abduction. Parents of female children do have also the suspicion that they will be spoiled if sent to schools. According to their beliefs, schools give the opportunity for female children to be dishonored. In situations such as this, the priests, who are serving the church and the people, are denied the prerogative to marry girls who are pure and clean. The question "who will serve the church if a female child is not kept chaste" is a serious concern of the adult society of the Woreda and the priests as raised in the focus group discussions male parents.

According to the doctrine of the Orthodox Church, a girl has to remain chaste to be the wife of a priest. To make the doctrine practical, the community of the woreda has found it safe and sound to wed their daughters while they are below the age of 10. This is one of the main reasons why the adult society favors child marriage. The other safest way to guarantee chastity is to stop the child from going to school.

The question of chastity is also a serious concern by the society. A female child has to remain chaste until marriage. Lose of virginity before marriage is a disgrace in the eyes of the society. The parents of the female child who lost her virginity before marriage are socially degraded as one key informant said.

The belief that a female child loses her virginity when she starts menstruating is also very strong in the woreda, according to the opinions of some key informants. This idea is also raised in the focus group discussion of mothers. The other fear is that the child may not have some one to marry her after the age of 10. The name *Kumoker* is given to a girl who is a grown up but not married.

The fear for social stigma instigates parents to wed their daughters in their early ages.

**To Create Bond between Families:** - Parents strongly desire to establish family relationship through marriage. The desire to be connected to a wealthy family or to a family who has fame and social recognition is a chief criterion for the arrangement of marriage by parents of the spouses. This opinion was forwarded by the key informants. As one key informant put it "A female child brings a bulwark to her parents".

A girl who has been divorced after bearing a child said during the focus group discussion that,

It was the sole interest of my parents to create bond with the family of my ex-husband that forced them to wed me. They did not ask my consent. I did not see him before the day of our marriage. I discontinued my education and got married. I hate him and often quarreled. Finally I came back home and gave birth to a son. At this time my former classmates were three grades ahead of me. This irritated me much.

The creation of bond between the two families is perceived as the source of strength in time of hardship and other occasions. Marriage is the means to forge relationship between families. Parents look for wealth, plot of land and blood line. The interests of the spouses are not considered.

**To Stop Long Running Feud Between Families:** - As six key informants stated, dispute between families is an observable phenomenon in the study woreda. The causes for the disputes are many and diversified. Disputes which began in the period of the ancestors continue to be active in the period of the descendants too.

There are also occasions where disputes are settled through marriage. As one of the participants of the focus group discussions narrated,

There was a dispute between two families in which murder was committed in return for previous murder (vendetta). In order to stop this long-running vendetta (revenge) between the two families, marriage was arranged between a boy of 12 years and a female child of 2 years.

When the boy heard about the marriage arrangement, he rejected the marriage because he did not want to marry the daughter of his family's enemy.

When the family of the female child heard what the boy had said, they became frustrated and angry. One of the members of the family of the female child killed the boy and disappeared. The child became victim of revenge.

Despite the above sad consequence, both the key informants and the participants of the focus group discussions have confirmed that there are several cases of child marriages in the Woreda that came as a result of stopping enmity between families.

### **The Desire to Increase Family Members**

During the interview sessions with the key informants, some interviewees explained that parents wed their children at early ages with the hope of getting many grand children who can help them in time of old age. In the focus group discussion of male parents, the idea that increased number of family is also a source of pride and respect was raised. According to their opinion, society gives high regard to families with large number of members. Families with large number of members are feared and no body from the community dares to create any conflict with any one of the members of such a family.

In rural areas labor is highly solicited by Parents. This is particularly true during the harvesting periods. The tasks of farming, collecting and thrashing the harvests demand labor. One of the sources of labor is the creation of bond between families through the conclusion of child marriage

The demand of labor and the aspiration to gain respect from the community seem to serve as pushing factors to conclude child marriage by parents of the Woreda regardless of its negative consequences.

**To Enjoy the Marriage Ceremony/feast:** - According to the explanation of all the key Informants and members of the focus group discussions, there is a sort of competition among parents in the preparation of quality feast. Parents of the bride and the groom highly desire to gain fame and social recognition. This can be realized by the quality of food they prepared and its abundance. The spirit of competition instigates parents of the spouses to raise the quantity of the feast and the number of days to enjoy the feast. By doing so, they boast saying "*Alemen Ayehu*" / I enjoyed the wedding of my child before I die/.

One of the most desired things by parents in life is to wed a child with large quantity and quality of feast. They call it "*Dil yale digis*" / a feast in abundance/. To meet the requirement of quality and quantity of feast, parents go to the extent of spending what ever they have. As participants of the focus group discussion of the divorced girls informed the researcher, many parents became economically depleted after concluding the marriage. Some times, parents borrow money from wealthy individuals of the community for the preparation of the feast and go on paying the debts after the wedding.

The quality of the feast and its abundance, however, forces members of the community to appreciate the feast while dignifying the parents of the spouse. The spirit of competition, which is "*Keman anishe*"/I am not lesser than others/ drive parents to spend whatever they have with out taking into account the negative economic consequence of extravagance.

**To make Spouses Live and Grow Together:** - The opinions of most of the key informants indicate that, Parents as well as members of the community do believe that spouses who are made to grow together do have respect for each other. They believe that they will act as a sister and brother. Living together gives the chance of knowing each other's behavior. Not only this, the spouses will have ample chances to understand the behaviors of members of both families. Spouses are made to live and grow together until they are able to manage their own lives. Similar opinions were also raised during the focus group discussions of male and female parents.

This cultural practice would have been much more appreciable had the attainment of physical maturity and psychological readiness been seriously considered and practiced by the community.

**Low level of Awareness about Its Harmful Effect:** - The problem child marriage is not noticed by all the people of the study Woreda, because of lack of education and awareness of its harmful effects. One mother who participated in the focus group discussion said:

We, parents have poor perception of the future; we do not anticipate the problems to come. What we think and want to do is to wed the child, enjoy the wedding, gain social acceptance, forge relationship and obtain economic gain. The fact is that the bride faces many problems in her married life. Lack of maturity does not allow the

child to bear the burden of married life. As a result, she encounters insurmountable problems. We lament over irrecoverable losses. All of us here had unforgettable experiences but never tried to act against child marriage. We only say that it is the tradition and the challenge of a female child.

All the key informants agreed that low level of awareness about the advantages and disadvantages of child marriage has caused the lives of many female children in the Woreda unmanageable.

In Dembia Woreda, the role of the tradition is not separated from the role of the religion as explained by some of the key informants. The people the Woreda consider what they are practicing as something that is accepted religiously. They take child marriage as something that has religious ground. The rites of child marriage are blessed by the religious people and what is fair in the eye of the religious leader is acceptable.

The above mentioned way of thinking can not be easily eliminated from the minds of the adult society, because it is erroneously associated with their religious beliefs.

**To Gain Material Benefits:** - As explained by most of the key informants and participants of the focus group discussions, the arrangement of child marriage benefits parents.

The provision of livestock or any other valuable materials as a dowry during child marriage is the norm of the society of Dembia Woreda. The Dowry, mainly in terms of livestock is a prerequisite. Possession of a plot of land as a result of the bond created by marriage is also the intent of the parents of the spouses. The contributions made are kept in the hands of the parents of the groom until the spouses are able to manage their properties.

The assumption is that the properties contributed by both parents of the spouses will serve as a start up capital in later lives of the spouses. This is not often true. There are times, as mentioned by the participants of the study, where the dowry kept aside for the spouses' later use, are consumed by the parents of the groom. In such occasions, the parents of the bride go to court for verdict. The court annuls such marriages.

The other intent of the parents of the spouses is to get back the money they paid for similar event. Generally, one can say that child marriage is concluded for the sake of material and spiritual benefits of parents and as a result, often ends up in divorce.

**To Ensure Good Living condition for the Child.** According to the explanation of the key informants, the major motive of parents is to wed their child to the son or daughter of wealthy parents and ensure a secured life. Parents highly desire a secured life for their child. To realize this fact, the need to wed their child to someone whose parents are wealthy is seriously considered. Wealthy parents' guarantee a pleasant life for the bride and as well as a support for her parents in time of need.

Children are taken as assets and bearing as many children as possible is necessary. The people of the study Woreda look child marriage in terms of economic advantages to both the spouses and their parents.

**The Desire to Get Support:-**One of the reasons for concluding child marriage is to get support from each other's family. This idea was mentioned repeatedly in the focus group discussions of the married and never married girls groups. One participant among the married children group said "my parents sold me. They desired to forge relationship with a wealthy family and wedded me to a man old enough to be my father".

The labor expended determines the amount of production you are going to get, said one key informant and added that parents highly desire to

increase the number of their families to meet this need. If a married child begins to bear children at her early age, she will have more than eight children until her menopause. This is most desired in marriage.

Children are needed for the support they are going to provide to their families beginning from their early childhood period. They start as shepherds and go to farming to satisfy the needs of their parents. However, the works accomplished by these children are not compatible to their ages.

**To Ensure continuity of Tradition:** - According to the views of key informants, religion and tradition are intrinsically linked. To negate the tradition is equally to negate the religion. This condition has made the abolishing of the harmful traditional practices of child marriage hard in Dembia Woreda. When one tries to show the negative effects of child marriage on the growth and development of children, the question of chastity and religion are raised. The church needs priests to carry out religious rites. These priests do want wives. The wives must be pure and clean. Unless marriage is concluded at a very early age, chastity can not be ensured according to their beliefs.

The opinions of the married and never married school children who participated in the focus group discussions, affirmed that sending female children to school is to create favorable ground for the loss of virginity. They believe that schools are not good environments to keep girls pure and clean. If girls are not kept pure, no body wants to marry them as virgins but as widows. Preparation of feast for the community is possible only when a virgin girl is married. The value attached to chastity is not seriously considered only by priests, but also by the ordinary adults who desire to conclude their first marriage. During the data collection sessions, the researcher had the chance of observing a case of child marriage, in the court of Dembia Woreda. A female child had reported earlier to the court about her marriage to a priest with out her consent. The court cancelled the marriage. This act was taken as a serious sin committed against God

in the eyes of her father and the community. The father of the girl refused to allow the girl to live with the family. The girl stayed in the house of the prosecutor for some days. Then, the father was summoned to court again and asked why he refused to let his child live with the family. He said:

the child was betrothed to a priest while she was an infant. Recently, the priest asked me to take her to his home. I can not say no, because he is a priest and it is a sin to say no to him. I told the child to go with him, she refused. I tried to punish her. Still she resisted. I told to the priest to abduct her. Before the abduction materialized, she came here and reported. The marriage was cancelled. I was ashamed because the priest can not marry any other lady except her. He can not lead life without a wife. If he does marry another woman, it is against the doctrine of the church. I was confused and could not know what to do. I left her here and went alone home.

The judge tried to pacify him, but the father was very sad. The judge after long period consultation told the man about the law and the right of the child and strictly warned him the consequences he will face if he fails to respect the law. Eventually, the man was asked to bring a bail. The girl was also told to report to the court every fifteen days and if she fails to do so the father was told that he would be responsible. in addition, it was decided that the ex-husband of the child come to court and sign an agreement to stop making any threat against the girl and also share the dowry.

The low level of awareness of the people of the woreda does not permit them to understand the differences between religion and tradition. The continuity of the tradition, according to the attitude of the people is a necessary aspect of the religion.

**The Fate of the Female Child:** - According to the opinions of the key informants and participants of the focus group discussions, the belief that

the fate of a female child is to become a house wife and a good mother is very strong among the people of the study Woreda. Religious and community leaders support this old traditional way of thinking. The people do not believe the idea that a female child can be self-supportive if educated. Sending female children to school is erroneously perceived as letting her to be spoiled and end up as prostitute according to their belief. In order to keep the social respect gained, parents prefer either to wed female children as early as possible or stop sending them to school until their weddings

The practice of gender discrimination and violation of the rights of the woman are not yet controlled effectively in the study Woreda.

In sum, the top four reasons according to the key informants and focus group discussions which compelled parents to conclude child marriage are the following.

- To get social prestige/recognition,
- To conform to cultural norm/ensure continuity of tradition,
- To establish family bond,
- To enjoy the marriage ceremony/feast.

As indicated above, child marriage in the Woreda is concluded either to the advantage of the community or parents of the spouses.

Participants of the study were asked about the reactions of the community if parents do not want to wed their children or if the spouses oppose the arranged marriage.

The reactions of the community toward to parents who go contrary to the social norm face the consequences of social disapproval and disrespect. If the spouses reject the marriage proposal the reaction of the parents and the community is very serious. The female child in particular, is condemned for her rejection of the marriage by the community. According to the responses of the participants of the study, the child is beaten by her

parents and forced to marry. She is cursed; insulted, psychologically torched and even parents go to the extent of chasing her from their houses. They blame the child for the social degradation caused against the family and agree with the parents of the groom to abduct her.

She also encounters social isolation from the community labeling her as rude and uncultured. The male spouse is not seriously condemned. This show that there is gender- discrimination

A girl of 14 years has this story to tell,

The marriage was concluded while I was a baby/*Yankeliba gabicha*/. As I grew up, I come to realize that I was married. Due to the respect I had to my father and the tradition, I said nothing about it, but continued to go to school.

I was 8 years old when my husband with his younger brother abducted me while returning home from school. I was beaten very seriously. They took me some where others could not find me. After 15 days, they again decided to take me to a remote place. One night, I escaped and come to town. I reported the incidence to the woreda court. My husband was forced to cancel the marriage under the order of the court. Currently, I am 14 years old. I live in town and learn. I am a seventh grade student. My ex-husband is trying to abduct me. His younger brother watches my movements. I am terribly afraid. I know that he does not hesitate to do something bad against me. My father is very old and weak. I have no one to stand by the side of me and that is the reason why he is always harassing me. I am planning to go to a far place and live peacefully.

The above mentioned case indicates that female children are not free of intimidation from their ex-husbands. Taking strict legal measure to ensure the rights of the female children and women is essential to guarantee the freedom of living.

### 4.3. Marriage Consents of the Spouses

The national as well as the international laws the country accepted prohibits marriage concluded without the consents of the spouses. Contrary to this children are wedded without their consents. Their right to make decision is curtailed.

Knowledge of spouses about their marriages

Table 3

Do the bride and groom know about their marriage?		Frequency	%
1	yes, they know about their marriages	6	4
2	No, they do not know about their marriages	69	43
3	only the groom knows	32	20
4	the bride knows	-	-
5	the bride does not know	53	33
Total		160	100

As indicated in table 3, 43% of the respondents said that the bride and groom do not know about their marriage. 33% of the respondents said that the bride in particular does not know about her marriage.

## Decisions of the spouses

Table 4

Can the bride or the groom oppose/ refuse the proposed marriage?		Frequency	%
Response			
1	Yes, they can oppose or refuse	3	2
2	No, they can not oppose or refuse	86	54
3	Only the bride can oppose	5	3
4	Only the groom can oppose	37	23
5	They are not allowed to give opinions	29	18
	Total	160	100

Table 4 shows that 54% of the respondents said that the bride can not oppose or reject the proposed marriage.

### Absence of bride's consent and decision

Table 5

Why can not the female child decide whom and when to marry?		Frequency	%
Response			
1	She is immature	56	35
2	She has only to fulfill the will of her parents	75	47
3	she must not negate the social norm	29	18
	Total	160	100

Table 5 indicates that 47% of the respondents said that a female child can not give her consent or make decision about her marriage but is obliged to fulfill the will of her parents.

In Dembia Woreda, the bride in particular, is not made aware of her marriage. Even if she does come to know, she can not oppose the

marriage, because parents believe that the child is immature and does not know what is important to her. This shows that there is a violation of rights and gender-discrimination.

Strong supporter of child marriage

Table 6

Response		Frequency	%
1	Father	61	38
2	Mother	27	17
3	Both parents	64	40
	Total	160	100

As indicated in table 6, parents of the spouse do support the marriage of their child, but the father of the spouse is a dominant figure to make decisions about the marriage.

When parents arrange marriages for their children, the age of the spouses is not taken as a factor of great importance. What matters most are their interests. Children married to older men are exposed to different forms of abuses and to the absence of exercising their rights of decision making.

As one key informant said, "the bride is unhappy and leads a life of misery. When she wants to divorce, her parents do not accept the idea of divorce; rather insist her to live with her husband. When things are not up to her interest, she runs away living every thing behind".

As stated earlier, marriage has to be concluded with the full consent of the spouses because it is the base for family life. In order to make the right decision about their marriages, the spouses have to be mature enough and psychologically ready. Any marriage concluded without the consent of the spouses is a violation of the right of children and women.

#### **4.4 “Yankelba gabicha”**

The concept of "yankeliba gabicha "is well perceived by the people of Dembia Woreda. The questions "What is yankeliba gabicha?, How is yankeliba gabicha arranged?, What are the differences between child marriage and yankeliba gabicha? " were posed to all the participants of the study( key informants, participants of focus group discussions, teachers and students). The results are organized in a logical manner and stated below.

##### **What is Yankelba gabicha?**

*Yankeliba gabicha* is a marriage concluded with the sole interest and agreement of the parents of the spouses. The agreement between the two parents goes as far back when the child is conceived. It is similar to promissory marriage.

It is called “*Yankelba gabicha*”. It can be also called “baby marriage”, because it is concluded before the female child is two years old. The male child can marry as far as he is below the age of 10.

##### **How is “Yankelba gabicha” arranged?**

“*Yankelba gabicha*” has an intended advantage. The parents of the spouses may need to establish bond between the two families or strengthen friendship. While the women are pregnant, the husbands promise to wed their children if they are of the opposite sexes or one of the parents has a son and the other parent's wife is pregnant. The agreement may be also concluded after the children are born. The two parents set aside some properties mainly livestock in the name of the spouses. This is done with the intention to enable the spouses start up their married lives with some properties. The rite of the marriage is different from child marriage. The bride does not go to her groom’s home. The property of the female (bride) called “*Yewog Eka*” is sent to the groom’s home instead of the bride. But there are occasions where the two parents invite each other. By the time that the spouses are able to walk and talk properly, both parents let the spouses grow together in each other parent's home. This is done to make the spouse grow as sister and brother.

##### **What are the difference between child marriage and “Yankelba gabicha?”**

The main differences as explained by the participants of the study are the following:-

- In “*Yankelba gabicha*”, the spouses do have the chance to know each other, but not in child marriage, except in rare cases.
- “*Yankelba gabicha*” has no immediate negative effect on the female child as regard to child marriage.
- There is not major feasting in “*Yankelba gabicha*”
- *Yankelba gabicha* is solely concluded by the agreement of the two parents. In child marriage, the community and religious leaders are involved.

In most cases, “*Yankelba gabicha*” ends up in divorce, because of misappropriating of the property of the spouses by the parents of the groom. Parents sell the livestock of the spouse in lean periods. They go to court and end up in divorce.

*Yankelba gabicha* is observed in Dembia woreda. The woreda is a surplus producing area and after harvest, the people do have the custom of feasting the community under different pretexts. One of the occasions is the arrangement of child marriage or “*Yankelba gabicha*”

#### **4.5. Attitude of the community toward Child Marriage**

Child marriage is practiced in Dembia Woreda , because the people like the practice or gain certain advantage as a result of child marriage.

The attitude of the people of Dembia Woreda

In order to understand the attitude of the participants of the study toward to child marriage, they were asked to give their opinions. Respondents of the questionnaire, both teachers and students said that they oppose child marriage. Among the key informants, two respondents said that child marriage is possible if the maturity of the female child is ensured. They believe that some female children become mature enough around the age of fifteen and sixteen. If such female children consent to marry, there is no problem according to them. In the male parent focus group discussion, one participant said that child marriage can be possible at the age of 13 and above. If a female child stays up to the age of 18 with out concluding marriage, the risk is very high. She may loose her virginity. This is a disgrace to the family. The same opinion was also forwarded from the female parents. At this discussion the value attached to chastity was high. Since the support given to child

marriage is based on certain conditions, their attitude toward to child marriage is not fully confirmed. The attitude of the other participants of the focus group discussions was not supportive.

The participants of the study were also asked whether the people of Dembia Woreda are supporting child marriage or not.

Table 7

Responses	number	%
Some of them support it	10	6
Some of them oppose it	16	10
Those who oppose out number those who support it	64	40
Those who support out number those who oppose it	70	44
total	160	100

As shown in table 7, 50% of the respondents said either that some of them support it or those who support out number those who oppose it. This means that half the people of the Woreda are supporting child marriage.

As to the estimation of the key informants, seven of them said that 40% of the people of Dembia support child marriage and the other three estimated 20% of the people as supporter of child marriage.

Among the women of the focus group discussion, there was a hot argument. One of the participant said “if the law permits, every body would like to conclude child marriage”. Another woman supported the idea and said “the enjoyment we had due to the arrangement of child marriage is no more there”. The youngest woman among the participants, spoke empathically opposing the other women who spoke earlier and said “all of us married while we were small children and we could remember the hardship we went through; how can we support child marriage? “At this moment one participant said “I was married at the age of seven. I used to sleep with my husband and had no sexual contact for two years. One night, I felt a needle piercing me and cried. No body came to help me. In the next days, he went on doing the same thing. I tried to rum away, but was not successful. I could not forget the agony of those days; I do not want my child to go through the same

condition". However, it was necessary to make them estimate the number of people who support child marriage. As to few participants, the opinion that the female child remains up to the age of 18 unmarried is not supportable, because the child may be raped or become pregnant which is a dishonor to her family. However, they did not dare to say openly that they support child marriage. Eventually, they believe that half the people of Dembia (50%) support child marriage. As to the opinion of the male participants of the focus group discussion, 40% of the people of Dembia support child marriage. Participants of the never married focus group believe that more than half (60% )of the people support child marriage and the married girls think that 50% of the people are supporting child marriage. In the never married group discussions participants spoke stressfully that the people of the Woreda support child marriage but due to fear of penalty pretend to oppose it. One divorced female child in the focus discussion said "if people are not supporting child marriage, why do they wed? People support child marriage because they gain certain advantages"

Overall, the data obtained suggest that at least half of the people of the Woreda support child marriage.

#### **4.6. Perceived Benefits/Advantages of Child Marriage**

When the question what do the bride, the groom, parents of the bride and the groom and families benefit or what are the perceived advantages child marriage on the parts of the bride, groom, parents of the bride and the groom and families were posed to all the participants of the study, certain benefits were mentioned . These benefits are summarized and presented below.

While treating the idea of benefits, two of the key informants (20%) and members of the focus groups discussions of the male parents and married children (30%) said that child marriage has no benefits at all. They mentioned the economic loss encountered in preparing the feast, the psychological trauma caused and the health problems encountered as the only results to be mentioned.

However, the rest of the participants tried to outline the benefits gained from child marriage. The data collected shows that the bride and the groom gain certain benefits,

whereas the parents of the spouses benefit a lot. The anticipation of advantage is a pushing factor to arrange child marriage without paying due respect to the law of the country and the negative consequences the bride is going to encounter.

#### 4.7. Child marriage and the law

The fact that children are under the process of development seeks the attention of society to protect them from harmful practices which deter their growth and development. Law which protects the violations of the rights of children and women are being implemented. Do the people of Dembia know the law which protects child marriage? Is child marriage a forced marriage or is it a violation of rights were the concern of the study and the responses collected from the respondents are stated below.

The knowledge about the law

Table 8

1. Do you think that the community does know that child marriage is against the law of the country?			
a	Yes, the community does know the law which prohibits child marriage	Frequency.	%
		82	51
b	No, the community does not know the law which prohibits child marriage	19	12
c	Some do know and others do not	59	37
	Total	160	100
2. Can we say that child marriage is a forced marriage?			
a	Yes	117	73
b	No	43	27
	Total	160	100
3. Is child marriage a violation of rights			
a	Yes, it is a violation of rights	109	68
b	No, it is not a violation of rights	51	32
	Total	160	100

As indicated in table 8, more than half (51%) of the respondents responded affirmatively. That is, more than half of the population of Dembia does know that child marriage is against the law of the country. All the key informants (100%) agree that the people of the woreda are knowledgeable about the Law which bans child marriage. In all the focus group discussions, the participants argued and finally agreed that at least half the people of the Woreda are knowledgeable of the law which prohibits child marriage.

As can be observed in table 8, 73% of the respondents believe that child marriage is a forced marriage and 68% believe that it is a violation of rights.

All the key informants and the participants of the focus group discussions believe that child marriage is a forced marriage and a violation of rights.

When the participants of the study were asked to name the laws they know, the Family Law, the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Constitution and the Criminal Law were mentioned.

**The Effectiveness of the Law:** - Despite the law, child marriages are arranged under different pretexts.

One of the key informants had to tell a story about an incidence of child marriage before he tried to give the reasons for the prevalence of the practice.

Once we received a report that a child of 8 years was going to marry in a remote kebele of the woreda. We went to the place and asked the parents to show us the child. They showed us a girl who was old enough to marry. We brought both the girl and her father to town. While we were investigating the case, the girl confessed that she was not the one to marry but her younger sister. When the father of the child was asked about the pretension, he explained that he did that because the little girl was betrothed in her babyhood and did not dare to refuse the marriage at that moment. He stressed that their long standing relationship would discontinue and on top of this, people of the community would strongly condemn him if he failed to conclude the marriage.

This indicates that some people do want to keep their words without taking into account the suffering of the child.

The people of the Woreda do have their own reasons why the law is not fully practiced.

- The people of the community do not report cases of child marriage to the appropriate law enforcing bodies. Even when reported, legal actions are not taken in the strictest sense of the law.
- The problem of child marriage is not taken seriously by government authorities. This encourages the community to continue the practice. The problem of child marriage is taken as a side issue, not as an agenda by itself.
- The attitude of the community toward to the practice of child marriage is positive. The attempts made to bring changes in attitude are unsatisfactory.
- Due to lack of knowledge about the ill-effects of child marriage, the effort expended on the part of the government to stop it is minimal.
- The traditional perception of the people about child marriage is not separated from the concepts of the religion they follow. According to the opinions of the people of the woreda, to oppose the practice of child marriage is to stand against the religion. This outlook has made the practice to continue with little or no resistance.
- The people need to be familiarized thoroughly with the religious doctrine so that they can distinctly perceive the differences between the religion and traditions to act accordingly. Changing the attitude of the religious leaders has to be a primary task to bring change of attitude in the community.

The rights of the woman and children are part of the law of the country, but these rights are not implemented strictly.

A girl of 10 years narrates her history as follows.

I think, it was when I was four years old that my father agreed to marry me to a man of 22 years old. I started going to school when I was seven years. I am in 4<sup>th</sup> grade at present.

My parents always forced me to go to the home of my husband and live there for some times. When I refused, they beat me. I wept daily. I shared my problem to my classmates. They advised me to go to the court and apply. I did as advised. I saw my husband in the court. He was a man of 26 years, very big one. I was frightened to see him let alone to sleep with him. The marriage was cancelled by the order of the court. The people in the community including my parents isolated me. My father often curses me. He says "*Awardishign*" /meaning you made me degraded or you lowered my

social status/. I have to keep quiet and learn. I know that one day, after completing my education, I will marry a man of my choice.

In the past few years child marriages are cancelled under the order of the court of the woreda.

Cancelled marriages by the court

Table 9

Year in E.C				Remark
	Male	Female	Total	
1997 E.C	4	43	47	* Up to the beginning of March, 2000E.C
1998 E.C	8	95	103	
1999 E.C	-	99	99	
2000 E.C	-	81	81	

As indicated in table 9, the number of cancelled marriages by the court is increasing yearly. This is due to the increased awareness of the people about the problem and understanding the role of the court.

#### 4.8. Consequences and /or Impact of Child Marriages

The consequences and/or impact of child marriage as to the opinions of the participants of the study ( key informants, focus group discussions, respondents structured and unstructured questions) are organized, classified and presented below.

##### Physical and Health Related Consequences and/ or Impacts

Abuses of different forms are committed:-

- The bride is physically abused by her husband and in- laws.
- The bride is forced into sexual activity with her husband when she is not ready or mature( sexual abuse )

- The husband and his family abuse the bride emotionally (make abusive remarks, degrade her etc.)

### **Maternal depletion:**

- The mother becomes physically and mentally depleted due to high birth rate
- She becomes weak and sick, gets old to her age and dies early
- She is affected by high fertility rate resulting in infant and child mortality etc.

### **High Maternal Morbidity and Mortality:**

- The mother becomes sick early and often.
- Dies early due to labor and pregnancy related illnesses like prolonged delivery.
- She becomes pregnant at an early age. Because of physical under development, normal delivery is not possible.
- Death during delivery may occur. Loss of life, still birth, rupture of the uterus/ Fistula/ etc. may be caused.
- Due to the health condition of the mother, premature birth and low birth weight are common.
- Access to health centers or hospitals is not usually possible due to reasons like distance, lack of money for the medication, preference to traditional way of treatment etc. These barriers increase the risk of maternal complications and mortality.

## **Social and Economic Consequences and/or Impact**

### **Denial of Childhood**

- The bride marries while she is still a child herself. She can not be able to bring up her child as properly as possible. She lacks the knowledge to nurse the baby.
- She can not shoulder house hold responsibility. As a result disagreement with the husband and in-laws occurs which leads to separation or divorce.
- Children loss the chance of growing with both parents. They are denied of their rights.

### **Lack of Educational Access:**

- Married children discontinue their education. They have no access to education after marriage.

**Rural-Urban Migration:**

- The hardship of married life forces the married child to run away to town or far away places.
- Run away girls end up as domestic servants or sex workers.
- Become vulnerable to HIV/AIDS
- Are open to sexual abuse and hard labor

**Social Isolation:**

- One of the serious consequences of child marriage is the problem of fistula which resulted in social isolation. Both families isolate the child affected by the problem of Fistula associating the incidence with a social curse or a possession of evil or a punishment of God.

**Social and Economic Deprivation:**

- Female children are unable to work due to high fertility
- Children married to older men are affected by male dominance. The husband denies her right to make choices.
- A married child is restricted of movement and is forced to lead a life of isolation.

The case history of a girl who refused to marry a priest is narrated below.

The girl is 11 years old and a student of 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The marriage agreement was concluded during her babyhood, she had no idea about her marriage until she reached the age of 7. She has an elder sister who is attending grade 9 and a brother in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Both of her elder brother and sister are not married. She said “When I become 9 years old, my parents asked me to go to the house of my husband and live there for some times. I refused. They punished me severely and smoked me burnt pepper. Still I resisted. They continued insisting me. I became determined to kill my self and drank “*Kerosene*”. I fell sick for sometimes, but survived.

Even after this incidence, my parents did not stop to ask me to go to the home of the priest. The man is well over the age of 30. One day, he tried to kidnap me, some how I escaped. My teacher helped me and I reported the case to the court. The marriage was cancelled by the court, but my parents chased me out of their house.

My sister and brother supported our parents. My father said it is a curse and my sister told me again and again that I must respect the words of my parents and do as I am told. The main reason for the marriage is that my husband is a priest. People of the community curse me openly. I can not stand the pressure. I have decided to go to a far away town and serve as a domestic worker after the school is closed she concluded.

Cases such as these are many. The girls who were participants of the focus group discussions do have similar stories to tell. Child marriage is really a social problem left unattended by the community and government officials. As the never married participants of the focus group discussion said 'there are many occasions where concerned government officials, particularly the kebele administrators do not take actions. They feast together with the community and act as if they do not know the arrangement of the marriage when asked'.

The problem of child marriage may be perceived as part of the national social problem and dealt seriously to enable the female child exercise her rights fully.

### **Psychological Consequences and/ or Impact**

- The bride is psychologically abused. The in-laws expect the child to act as a matured girl and if she fails to do so they shower all the insults and curses upon her. Acts such as these leave the child isolated and depressed.
- It is really a burden to become a wife and a mother for a child. She is not ready to accept and play the role of a wife and mother. This affects her social relationship and her psychological well-being.
- The psychological trauma of the first sexual contact affects the normal relationships with her husband and other males in her later life. The girl develops hatred to males. She resists to sexual intercourse even when she is fully grown.
- Problems related to personality development may arise as a result of child marriage. Depression, fear for male individuals and absence of love for the husband are caused because of pre-mature sexual contact on the part of the bride. The life of the child will

be unhappy and miserable, because once sexual contact is established the husband is concerned only for his sexual satisfaction at the expense of the suffering of the child.

- The large spousal age gap added with the consistent forced sexual intercourse makes the bride develop resentment against her husband. She often tries to run away. The hardship she goes through is not noticed by her parents. They force the bride to live with her husband. When the bride despairs, she may go to the extent of committing suicide. Incidences such as this were raised by the participants of the study in the focus group discussion of married girls.

Child marriage leads to a life of intolerance and abhorrence. The negative effects caused on the physical, mental, emotional, social and cultural development of the married children is serious. It needs immediate attention as part of the task for the creation of a better generation.

#### **4.9. Solutions Presented by the Participants of the study to Curb Child Marriage**

Finally, the participants of the study were requested to forward solutions to the problem .

One of the main reasons for the continuous practice of child marriage in

The woreda is lack of knowledge about the ill-effects of child marriage.

It is, therefore, necessary to sensitize the community on the ill- effects of child marriage.

- The people of the woreda must be aware of the negative impact of the harmful traditional practices on the normal growth and development of children. The community must specifically know that child marriage is a harmful traditional practice which should be eliminated.
- Ensure that children are capable of and in a position of defending their rights. This is possible when the participation of children is enhanced at school level and become capable of defending their rights assertively.
- Parents as well as the community must understand the benefits of education and send their children to school.

- The traditional belief that female children must not go to school but become good wives and mothers must not continue. Government bodies and others concerned must combat this deep-rooted traditional belief.
- The law of the country which is against the practice of child marriage must be strictly enforced.
- It is necessary to keep the interest of children without discrimination. Children of both sexes have the need to go to school and this need has to be catered for.
- Parents must not be self- conceited. The desire for social prestige, establishment of family bond, the need for acquiring material benefits must not force them to wed their children at their early years.
- Children have rights. The rights to education and the rights to make full and free consent to marry have to be practiced.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### **5.1 Prevalence of Child Marriage in Dembia Woreda**

Child marriage is a common phenomenon in many countries of the world.

Ethiopia is signatory both to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. These international laws have become parts of the law of the country. The FRDE constitution, the Family Code of Amhara National Regional State proclamation No. 79/2003, the revised family code proclamation of 2000, the Penal Code and other legislative measures are in force, however, the practice of child marriage is not checked in Dembia Woreda of North Gondar of the Amhara National Regional State. As the result of this study indicates, the prevalence of child marriage in Dembia Woreda is 30%. Hence, one can infer that child marriage is a problem that needs attention.

A study conducted in the Amhara region indicates, Dembia is among the three Woredas in the Amhara region where child marriage is a serious problem. The other two are *Ankasha* and *Awabel*. Studies have also confirmed that the rate of early/child marriage in the Amhara National Regional State was 82%, followed by Tigray Region 79%.

Naturally, when children reach in their teens, it is normal for them to seek more independence. However, Female children in Dembia Woreda are under strict surveillance. The desire to preserve virginity urges parents to impose restriction on freedom of movement and expression and access to education.

The prevalence of child marriage is 30% in Dembia Woreda due to various reasons. These reasons are closely attached with their religious belief and the tradition.

In the eyes of the community, the importance of marriage is measured in child bearing. Parents greatly aspire to have as many children as possible. Children are source of pride. They will be married to wealthy family to forge relationship, secure economic advantage and gain social respect. These perceived views of parents make them to wed their female

child as early as possible. The problems that bride child is going to face is unnoticed by parents as well as by the community.

These days, child marriage is not arranged openly due to fear of the law. To avoid legal measure parents conclude the marriage of their under aged children under the pretexts of Mahiber or other events to avoid penalty. This has made the prevalence of child marriage to be seen as disguised and less than what is actually happening on the ground. The public eye is being blinded on the issue.

Unless the seriousness of the problem receives due attention from government officials at national, regional, zone, Woreda and kebele levels and efforts are exerted, the problem will increase in magnitude undoubtedly. Duty bearers at all levels must understand that a child made to marry while she is below the age of 18 is in the process of development and needs legal protection. The lenient attitudes of the people of the Woreda and Loose legal measures, have contributed to the practice of child marriage to go unabated.

The low level of awareness of the people of the Woreda about the negative effects of child marriage coupled with inability to differentiate the roles of religion from the long existing traditions have caused the practice of child marriage to continue affecting the lives of many female children in Dembia Woreda of North Gondar. It seems important that the people of the woreda be intensively sensitized to distinctly understand the differences between religion and tradition and act accordingly.

Regardless of the law, the people of Dembia Woreda are arranging child marriage. The tradition of concluding child marriage and the worshiping of the religion have been linked together for the past many years. The people are not able to see the two separately and avoid the harmful tradition of child marriage.

## **5.2 The underlying Reasons for Child Marriage**

As the result of this study shows, the practice of child marriage continues to go unchecked for various reasons. The reasons can be seen in terms of social, economic and cultural factors.

**Social factors:-** the social factors are the desire for gaining social prestige /respect or recognition/, fear of social stigmatization/ disapproval/, desire to forge family relationship, to increase family members/ grand children/, to enjoy the feast of the marriage, low level of awareness about the ill-effects of child marriage, loss of virginity, the desire to stop long running feud between families, to enable spouses live and grow together and low level of awareness about it's harmful effects.

**Economic factors:** - The economic factors as stated by the participants of the study are material benefits, to ensure secured life for the child and the desire to get support.

**Cultural factors:** - The cultural factors are the desire to ensure the continuity of tradition and the belief that the fate of a female child is to marry, be a good wife and raise children. The researcher is unable to get any study conducted in the same area on the same topic; however, as studies conducted in the Amhara region indicated, the reasons provided for concluding child marriage are almost similar to the findings of this study.

The major reasons which drive the people of Dembia Woreda to continue the practice of child marriage are indicated in the result section of this study. One way or the other, the development of female children is deterred due to marriage concluded before the age of maturity.

The representatives of the study were also requested to raise some the reactions of the community if parents are not willing to conclude child marriage. The opinions gathered from the responses provided by key informants and participants of focus group discussions are that:

- Parents face social disapproval and rejection.
- The people in the community, particularly the elderly, develop unfavorable attitudes toward parents who are unwilling to conclude child marriage.

On the other hand, if spouses are unwilling to accept the proposed marriage, particularly the female spouse, the consequences are serious. Some of the consequences suggested by the participants of the study are given below.

- Parents do not tolerate acts which go contrary to their opinions. They go to the extent of seriously beating and forcing the child to marry.
- The child is cursed, insulted and made psychologically uncomfortable.

- The female child may be chased out of the house and ignored by the family.
- Parents blame the child for the social degradation she caused against the family.
- Parents may agree with the family of the groom to abduct the child/ bride.
- The community isolates the female child naming her rude and uncultured. But nothing serious happens to the male spouse.

### **5.3. Marriage Consents of the spouses**

As many studies conducted indicated the consents of the spouses are necessary. Any child below the age of 18 can not also give his consent, if at all he/she does, it is not legally accepted. As the result of this study indicated, spouses are not asked about their consent or decision. the parents of the spouses make the decision for the marriage without consulting the bride or groom

When some grooms become aware of their marriages they can oppose the proposed marriages, but almost none of the brides are made aware about their marriages or consulted to decide about their marriages. Even if they try to oppose, they are not accepted. The groom seems to be more privileged than the bride. The bride is looked either as immature or as an individual obliged to accept the will of her parents.

Although, both parents strongly support the marriage of their child, the father is more dominant in supporting the arrangement of marriage for his daughter. This indicates that the elimination of child marriage can be possible when the attitude of the male parent is changed.

The reasons why the spouses are not asked about their consents of marriage are many as to the opinions of the key informants and participants of the focus group discussions. The summarized opinions are under mentioned.

One primary reason among others is that parents believe that children do not have the right to agree or disagree about their marriages, because they are not mature enough and have no adequate knowledge to give decisions. Rights such as these belong to parents. Parents do know what is good or bad for their children and undoubtedly, choose what is good for their child. Parents argue that children are immature and do not make the right

choices. More over, the tradition does not allow the spouses to make consents or decide about their marriage. As a result, most of the child marriages concluded end up in divorce. One participant in the focus group discussion of female parents said “all of us here are not living with our first husbands. We divorced them because they were not our choices.”

#### **5.4. *Yankeliba gabicha***

In Dembia Woreda, the practice of *yankeliba gabicha* is accepted by the society. Female babies are wedded before they begin to walk or talk by the agreement of both parents of the babies. Parents do have the desire of creating relationship with a wealthy and respected family. In order to realize this wish, the fathers of the presumed spouses promise to each other to create relationship through marriage.

*Yankelba gabicha* is almost similar to ordinary child marriage except that *Yankeliba gabicha* is concluded before the age of two in the case of the female child. It is a pride to say that some body concluded *yankeliba gabicha*. The problem is that the relationship forged does not end well in most cases.

#### **5.5. Attitude of the community toward child marriage**

Child marriage is one of the harmful traditional practices. Government and non-government agents sensitize the community to stop the practice but it is not possible to eliminate the practice of child marriage. The penalty imposed against those who transgress the law is often explained in meetings and other gatherings. Despite all the efforts made to prohibit the practice, the people still conclude child marriage secretly. Sometimes, the marriage is concluded unaccompanied by feast. At other times, the marriage is arranged in the name of other events. Parents go to the extent of increasing the age of the child to 18 to legalize the marriage.

Even though, many people in the Woreda do know that child marriage is illegal, they do not report cases of child marriage to the law enforcing bodies of the Woreda. This by itself shows that the people are in favor of child marriage.

As indicated in table 9, in the past three years alone, a total of 283 child marriages were cancelled by the court. This fact strengthens the suggestions provided by the participants of the study that child marriage is supported by at least half the people of Dembia.

## **5.6. Perceived Benefits / Advantages of Child Marriage**

As indicated in this study, the perceived benefits/ of child marriage are not totally accepted by all the respondents of the study. As to some of the subjects of the study, child marriage has no any benefits. However, according to the participants of the study, the perceived benefits/ advantages of child marriage are:-

### **To the bride: -**

- After marriage, the style of hair dressing of the bride differs from those who do not marry. This is a sign for deserving respect from the community.
- She gains respect and praise as a disciplined child by the community
- She joins the camp of womanhood
- She is given new name by her in-laws

### **To the parents of the bride:**

- Parents gain social respect
- They regain the money they paid previously for similar occasions.
- Enjoy the marriage of their child while they are alive.
- Establish bond with the groom's family.
- Deserve support in time of need

### **To the family of the bride:**

- Share the feast
- Maintain a relationship with the groom's family
- Gain pride and respect, from the community

### **To the groom:**

- Satisfies his sexual desire
- Gain's social recognition and respect
- Joins adulthood
- Gets present from the family of his wife

To the parents of the groom:

- They get dowry and the property the bride brings belongs to them.
- Gains social respect
- The mother of the groom gets additional labor
- Establish relationship with the bride's family
- Enjoy the marriage ceremony and the feast

To the family of the groom:

- Share the feast
- Establish bond with the bride's family
- Became proud and gain social respect

These benefits/ advantages serve as driving forces for the conclusion of child marriage without looking to the ill-effects caused against the bride during her married life

### **5.7. Child marriage and the law**

According to the responses of respondents, 51% of them believe that the people of Dembia Woreda are knowledgeable about the law which prohibits child marriage. Then, why do they practice it? One possible answer may be that the application of the law in its strictest sense might have not been realized. The other reason may be that fear of retaliation from families of the spouses does not let persons to report cases of child marriage to the law enforcing bodies. The measure taken by the law enforcing body may not be up to the expectation of persons who oppose child marriage and this might have discouraged them to report. Since child marriage is a traditionally accepted phenomenon, even those who are duty bearers may not want to stand against the norm of the community. Different reasons can be given for the impracticality of the law, but one fact is clear, that the lives of female children in the Woreda are under serious threat.

Article 3 of the convention on the Rights of the Child states that in all action concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities, or legislative bodies, the interest of the child shall be a primary consideration. Children have to be protected from any form of abuse. Parents or other individuals who are legally responsible for the child must ensure this protection.

Children who are not fully developed physically, psychologically and socially are married to men, usually very much older than them, with out taking into account the large spousal age gaps. It is a forced marriage which shows that it is a form of gender based violence of rights.

The provision of the opportunity to be heard in the court about issues which affect the life of the child, specifically the female child is appropriate and necessary to reduce markedly the plights of female children in the woreda.

### **5.8. Consequences and/or Impact of Child Marriage**

The results of this study have indicated the consequences and/ or impact of child marriage. These consequences and/or impact are similar to other studies conducted in the Amhara region. There are no researches conducted in Dembia Woreda alone taking into account the problem of child marriage, however, since the Woreda is located in the Amhara region, the problem of child marriage is rife this Woreda too.

The participants of the study were asked to outline the consequences and/or impact of child marriage. The ideas forwarded are compiled and listed below.

- **Child marriage is a violation of rights:** - Both national and international laws recognize the rights, freedom and duties of children. Ethiopia has signed to undertake the necessary steps to realize these laws. The survival, protection and development of children are ensured according to the law of the nation. However, children are not free of discrimination, their best interests are not considered fully and their views and opinions are not attended. This is particularly true in the lives of female children.
- Individuals under the age of 18 are in the process of growth and development. They grow and develop physically, mentally and socially. They are also in the process of gaining psychological maturity. Child marriage deters these processes. Female children become stunted because of the unfavorable circumstances encountered in their childhood period.
- Child marriage requires the consents and decisions of the spouses, physical growth and psychological readiness. Any marriage arranged in the absence of the above mentioned criteria is a violation of rights.

- Children are forced to make sexual intercourse before they reach the age of maturity. As a result, they suffer from long term psychological trauma, Pregnancy, child rearing, hard domestic chores etc. These are the fate of female children in Dembia Woreda.

The belief that a female child must be groomed to be disciplined, good wife and a mother discourage parents to send their female children to school. Female children are denied the right to education. Lack of education means lack of knowledge about sexual relations, and reproduction. Uneducated female child lacks the ability to make decisions in matter related to her married life. The married child remains submissive to her husband. Lack of education leads to increased vulnerability of abuse and poor health.

- A child bride is forced to sexual initiation at a very early age. This is done when the child is not physically developed. This situation often leads to health hazards. Early pregnancy, prolonged delivery, still birth, maternal mortality, heavy bleeding, infection and above all, the problem of Fistula are the results of child marriage. A female child with Fistula is ostracized as unclean or possessed by devil. Relatives abandoned children with cases of Fistula. One participants in the male parent focus group discussion said that he saw a girl of fistula case left alone in a small house to die. Her parents thought that it was a punishment of God and did not try to take her to a hospital. The girl died after six months. Stigmatization and social isolation are the fate of a female child who made to marry before she is fully developed.
  - Married children are victims of child abuse. The in-laws and the husband abuse the bride physically and emotionally. She is also open to sexual assault. The bride leads a life of unhappiness and misery. Divorce or running away is the end result in most cases, if not suicide.
  - Children, who are forced into married lives at their early years, begin to bear children early. This situation does not allow them to up bring their off spring in good manners. The new born babies may be abused as their mothers were in their childhood.
  - The large spousal age gap makes the wife to fear and see her husband as a stranger. Age gap between spouses is not often observed as a problem because the marriage is arranged by parents alone with out the full consent of the spouses. Sometimes, the age gap may be wide and husbands die while the wife is still young. The burden of child rearing becomes the responsibility of the mother. Usually the man experiences

sexual life before marriage and may be a source for sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

- The burden of bearing and rearing many children by the spouses make their lives full of misery and unhappiness.
- The married child faces the problem of early pregnancy, child birth, the burden of child upbringing, home management and stressful working conditions. The psychological trauma caused due to forced sexual intercourses makes the bride to develop hatred for her mate leading her to divorce or run way to towns.
- Female children are exposed to health hazards including the problem of death, illness, Fistula, social isolation, stigmatization and personality maladjustment.

The solutions provided by other studies conducted on early marriage are almost identical to the results of this study. Enhancing the participation, of female children and women at schools and Kebeles of the Woreda, the provision of child rights education, equal access to education and absence of gender discriminations etc. are suggested as solutions to the problem.

## CHAPTER SIX

### 6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **6.1. SUMMARY**

The main purpose of the study was to describe the prevalence of child marriage in the Woreda, to identify the underlying reasons, to explore the perceived advantages of child marriage, to explain the consequences and/ or impact of child marriage and suggest solutions. To accomplish this task, subjects were selected using both random and purposive sampling techniques.

The tools used to collect the necessary data were both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

The prevalence of child marriage is 30% in the Woreda and there are various underlying reasons for concluding child marriage in the Woreda. Among the reasons, the desire to gain social recognition, the need to conform to the social norm of the society, to establish family bond and to enjoy the wedding ceremony can be sited as major ones.

The perceived advantages of child marriage are also indicated in the study. The parents of the spouses are benefited from concluding child marriage. The benefits are both spiritual and material.

The consequences and/or impact along with the suggested solutions to the problem are cited in the study too. The consequences of child marriage are negative when looked from the side of the married female child. It will result in a serious health problem including death and personality maladjustment.

The implementation of the law in its strictest sense by government officials and others concerned along with changing the attitude of the people through continuous awareness raising activities among others, are suggested as solutions to the problem.

#### **6.2. CONCLUSION**

The study indicates that child marriage is a common traditional practice in Dembia Woreda and this is confirmed by its rate of prevalence. The communities of the Woreda have different underlying reasons for concluding child marriage although their reasons are

contrary to the interest and needs of children, particularly the female children. The consequences and/or impact of child marriage are diversified and serious. Unless due attention is provided by concerned authorities and strict application of the law is in force, the lives of many female children will be jeopardized. The need to eliminate this harmful traditional practice is not questionable. It needs immediate action.

### 6.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section treats major issues which require actions, based on the findings of the study, to eliminate child marriage in Dembia Woreda. The recommendations may serve both government and non-government organizations presently working in the Woreda to combat the harmful traditional practice of child marriage.

1. The spread of child marriage is unchecked in the Woreda, because the problem is not taken as an agenda of priority by the government. It is taken as a side issue by duty bearers of the Woreda and dealt accordingly. It is, therefore, recommendable to take the problem of child marriage as an issue of priority and act to eliminate it.

2. Many children are forced to marry before the age of 10. In most cases these children are forced to have sex against their will. They are also abused by their husbands and in-laws. Long hours stressful working conditions and isolation are their lots. As a result, they suffer from long term psychological trauma. Their personality development may be affected. It is, therefore, recommendable to take the following measures by duty bearers and other concerned bodies:

- Due to unbearable living conditions, many married girls run away to towns located in far places. Apart from economic assistances, they highly need psych-social services like counseling, shelter, education, recreation services, skill trainings etc. Provide these psychosocial services in the major destination towns for female child migrants due to causes of child marriages.

---Establish centers for the provision of counseling services in major destination towns like Gondar, Bahir dar, and Addis Ababa etc.

---Train semi-professionals (Para-counselors) and assign them to provide counseling services to migrating girls due to causes of child marriage.

---Undertake family integration (re-unification) services

---Provide supports to rehabilitate girls who are victims of child marriage.

---Create networks among the workers of the counseling centers and duty bearers located in major destination towns to curb child marriage and the migration of victims of child marriages.

3. The development of a nation is dependent on the development of its children. Childhood is, therefore, a crucial period which seeks the attention of parents, the family, the community and the government bodies. Growth and development of children with normal personality development is attained only in favorable environments. In order to realize the normal growth and development of children, the following actions are recommended to be taken by the duty bearers of Dembia Woreda:

- Ensure that the people of the Woreda are able to differentiate the cultural practices which negatively affect the growth and development of children through continuous sensitization activities for different target groups. Make good parenting style part of the agenda for discussion in any community meetings. This could be done by Identifying exemplary parents from the community, provide them the necessary trainings and engage them in sensitizing members of their respective communities to abandon child marriage.
- Make distinct that tradition and religion are two different things which must be treated separately. Focus on the provision of awareness raising education to priests and sheiks on the role of religion and tradition. Train selected voluntary priests and sheiks of the Woreda to teach others about the differences between religion and traditions.
- Select voluntary persons (activists) from every community of Dembia Woreda and train them on the harmful traditional practices of child marriage. Assign the trainees the task of sensitizing their respective community members (kebeles), empower them to register and report child marriage cases to the law enforcing bodies of the Woreda and ensure that actions are taken against the perpetrators based on the reports provided by activists

4. Parents, community and religious leaders, health professionals, women and youth association members, leaders of Idirs and Mahibers, law enforcing bodies, non-government organizations, and children themselves have roles to play to stop the practice of child marriage in the woreda. Identify the roles each actor has to play, conduct workshops to discuss the problem together, be committed and reach to a consensus to tackle the problem, prepare working schedules and act.

5. The laws of the nation have granted certain basic rights to children and women. The right to protection from any form of abuses is granted by the state of the nation. Child marriage is one form of child abuse. In order to protect female children from different forms of abuses, The following measures may be taken.

- Make duty bearers/ government bodies/ of the Woreda familiarized thoroughly with the international law the country has accepted and the national law which defend the rights of children and women prior to assigning in government offices. Make this task mandatory.
- Ensure that law enforcing bodies are strictly implementing the laws.
- Since birth registration is the right of the child, ensure that the birth and marriage registration are undertaken in each kebele of the Woreda. Establish a desk in each Kebele and assign individuals with the necessary supports to register birth, marriage, and death and divorce incidences. Prohibit child marriage with out getting marriage certificate from the court of the Woreda.
- Assign Kebele administrators to follow up cases of child marriage and report to the court. Hold kebele administrators responsible for child marriage concluded with out producing marriage certificate.

6. Strictly observe that child right is implemented in the Woreda. Initiate school children, women and other concerned individuals to report incidences of child marriage to the court or to the Police. Encourage their efforts and show that their reports are considered by penalizing the perpetrators.

7. The people of the woreda have high regards to the opinions and ideas of the religious and community leaders. In order to stop the practice of child marriage in the Woreda, make use of them to convince the people of their respective localities.

8. Education helps female children to understand the negative effects of child marriage and other harmful practices, it may be, therefore, necessary to:

- Make education of female children compulsory in the Woreda
- Teach female children about their rights
- Provide sex-education and life skill training to female children at schools of the Woreda.
- Ensure that clubs established in schools provide education on family planning and use of contraceptives, reproduction health, HIV/AIDS etc.
- Encourage female children to establish "girls club" in schools to learn about their specific problems.
- Train teachers as Para counselors at school level and ensure that each school has Para counselors
- Provide counseling services to children in general and to female divorced children in particular.
- Ensure the participation of children in matters of their concerns.

9. Make use of the Gondar education media for sensitizing the people of North Gondar on harmful traditional practices. Involve parents, religious and community leaders and children themselves in the sensitizing program.

10. The inclusion of child marriage issues in the curriculum is important to make children conscious about the problem. Undertake advocacy activity for the inclusion of child marriage in the curriculum of the Amhara National Regional State.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

### STUDY ON CHILD MARRIAGE IN EMBIA WOREDA OF N. GONDAR ZONE

#### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MALE AND FEMALE SCHOOL AND OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN AND YOUTHS

To the Respondents: - You are requested to provide us information about child marriage. The information you provide us will help us to know more about child marriage and Yankelba gabicha in the Woreda. Please feel free and forward your opinion to each question raised by the moderator. You will be informed about the result of the study. Thank you in advance for your full consent to participate in the discussion.

1. Do you think that child marriage is practiced widely in Dembia Woreda? If there are 100 female children how many of them will be wedded before they reach the age of 18?

2. What are the underlying reasons which compel parents to practice child marriage?

What is the attitude of the people of Dembia woreda toward child marriage?

If the bride and the groom are not willing to accept the proposed marriage, what are the problems they are going to face?

3. Do you support or oppose child marriage?

If you support what are your reasons?

If you oppose, what are your reasons?

What do you do to stop child marriage in the Woreda?

4. People in Dembia Woreda are conducting Yankeliba gabicha, what is yankeliba gabicha?

How do they conduct it?

What are the differences between child marriage and Yankeliba gabicha?

Tell us what you know about yankeliba gabicha?

Why do parents conduct yankelba gabicha?

What do parents benefit from Yankelba gabicha or from wedding their children?

5. Are the bride and groom made to know each other and share opinions about their marriage?

Why do not parents allow the bride and the groom to give their opinions about their marriage?

If marriage is concluded without the consent of the spouses, do you think that there will be any problem/please explain it?

Please tell us the influencing persons to conclude child marriage?

6. What do parents benefit from child marriage?

What do the parents of the bride benefit?

What do the families of the bride benefit?

What does the bride benefit?

What do the parents of the groom benefit?

What do the families of the groom benefit?

What does the groom benefit?

What does the community benefit from child marriage?

7. Why do the people of Dembia Woreda support child marriage?

8. What are the negative consequences of child marriage?

9. What must be done to stop child marriage and Yankeliba gabicha in the Woreda?

10. What can the following persons do to stop child marriage?

Parents of the spouses

Elders of the Woreda

Religious leaders of the Woreda

Woreda government officials

Health professionals

Members of youth associations of the Woreda

Members of the women association of the Woreda

Iders and Mahibers found in the Woreda

Children of the Woreda

Community members of the Woreda

Others-----

11. Do you know that there is a law which prohibits child marriage?

Tell us what you know about the law

Do you believe that child marriage is a violation of child rights?

Why is the law impracticable?

What must be done to effectively practice the law?

12. What is the consequence and/or impact of child marriage?

7. Why do not parents allow the bride and the groom to give their opinions about their marriage?

If marriage is concluded without the consent of the spouses, do you think that there will be any problem/please explain it?

Please tell us the very influential persons in concluding child marriage?

8. What do parents benefit from child marriage?

What do the parents of the bride benefit?

What do the families of the bride benefit?

What does the bride benefit?

What do the parents of the groom benefit?

What do the families of the groom benefit?

What does the groom benefit?

What does the community benefit from child marriage?

9. Who are the persons that can convince the people to stop child marriage?

10. What are the consequences of child marriage? Please explain to us?

11. What must be done to stop child marriage and Yankliba gabicha?

12. What can the following persons do to stop child marriage?

Parents of the spouses

Elders of the Woreda

Religious leaders of the Woreda

Woreda government officials

Health professionals

Members of youth associations of the Woreda

Members of the Women Association of the Woreda

Iders and Mahibers found in the Woreda

Children of the Woreda

Community members of the Woreda

Others.....

13. Do you know that there is a law which prohibits child marriage?

Tell us what you know about the law

Do you believe that child marriage is a violation of child rights?

Why is the law impracticable?

What must be done to effectively practice the law?

What must be done to implement child rights?

13. What makes the life of the married child miserable? Please tell us in detail?

15. Do you know any child who encounters health problem because of her marriage?

What was the problem?

What happened to her? Please tell us the incidence in detail?

16. What are the impacts of child marriage?

Thank you!!

### Appendix 3

Questionnaire on Child Marriage to be responded by Parents, Kebele Administrators, Religious Leaders, Elders, Married Girls or Youths, Students and Teachers in Dembia Woreda of North Gondar

This questionnaire is prepared to solicit information on child marriage. Respondents are kindly requested to respond to each question freely and with no reservations. The information that you provide will help us to know more about child marriage in the Woreda. We appreciate the cooperation you show in advance.

1. Respondent Status:    Students    Teachers
2. Sex ----- 3. Age----- 4. Religion----- 5.-----Education 6. Type of Work-----  
-----
7. Marital Status     Married    Never-married     divorced  death
8. As to your opinion, why do families conclude child marriage? Please list down your reasons  
a)----- b)-----  
c)----- d)-----  
e)----- f)-----  
g)-----
9. What is the best age for marriage? For male child-----years. For female child----years
10. Do the bride and the groom know about their marriage? a) Yes, they do know  
b) They do not know c) only the groom knows d) The bride alone knows  
e) the bride does not know.
11. Who selects the wife or the husband for the child? a) The bride b) the groom  
c) the father of the groom d) father and mother of the spouses e) the father of the bride  
f) other, please specify-----.
12. What are the reasons for not allowing the bride and bridegroom to know each other?-----  
-----  
-----
13. Can the bride or the groom refuse the proposed marriage? a) Yes, they can  
b) they can not c) Only the bride can refuse d) only the groom can refuse

e) they are not allowed to give opinions. f) other, please specify-----  
-----

14. What will happen if the bride or groom opposes the proposed marriage?

a)----- b)-----

c)----- d)-----

15. Do you support child marriage? a) Yes b) No

16. If you support child marriage, what are your reasons?-----  
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17. If you oppose child marriage, why do you oppose it?-----  
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18. Who support strongly child marriage among family members? a) father b) mother

c) Both parents d) the family as a whole

19. As your opinion, why do families conduct child marriage? List down your reasons

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20. Do you think that the community does know that child marriage is against the law of the country? a) Yes the community knows the law which prohibits child marriage

b) the community does not know the law which prohibits child marriage.

21. Do you think that child marriage is widely practiced in the Woreda? -----  
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22. What are the ill-effects of marriage on the over all development of the female child?

Please name some of the ill-effects child marriage on development?-----  
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23. People are heard saying that there is Yankelba gabicha in Dembia Woreda, is it true?

) Yes there is, b) No there is not

24. What does Yankeliba gabicha mean?-----  
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25. What are the differences between child marriage and Yankeliba gabicha?-----  
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26. Why do families practice Yankeliba gabicha?-----  
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27. Why does the society accept and practice yankeliba gabicha?-----  
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28. What must the following persons do to stop both Yankeliba gabicha and child marriage in the Woreda? (Use the back side of the paper if necessary)

- a) Parents-----
- b) Community elders-----
- c) Religious leaders-----
- d) Health professionals-----
- e) Youth organizations-----
- f) Government-----
- g) Children themselves-----
- h) Others, please specify-----

29. The female child can not decide when and whom to marry because:  
a) She is immature    b) She has only to fulfill the wishes of her parents    c) She must not neglect the social norm    e) Other-----

30. Was there any attempt made to stop child marriage in the Woreda?  
a) Yes, there were attempts    b) no, there were no attempts made.

31. What were the results of the attempts?-----  
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32. What are the perceived advantages of child marriage? (use the back side of the paper if necessary)

On the part of the bride-----

On the part of the groom-----

On the part of the bride's parents-----

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On the part of the groom's parents-----

-----

Among the bride's family-----

Among the groom's family-----

33. What is the attitude of the people of Dembia Woreda to ward child marriage?

- a) Some of them support it
- b) Some of them opposite it
- c) Those who oppose out number the supporters
- d) those who support out number the opponents

34. Why do you think that child marriage makes the life of the female suppose miserable?

List down what you know.

35. Have you come across any female child who encountered a problem due to marriage?

- a) Yes
- b) No

35. If your answer is yes, what was the problem she encountered?-----

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37. What are the impressions/impact created on the female child because of marriage?-----

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38. What do you suggest as solutions to the problem of child marriage?-----

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39. Can one say that child marriage is a forced marriage? a) Yes b) No

Thank you!!