

A Qualitative Assessment on the Relationship
between Early Marriage & Divorce:
The case of Mecha Woreda in Amhara Region


By

Rediet Mesfin0000

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and all the sources of information used for the study have been duly acknowledged.

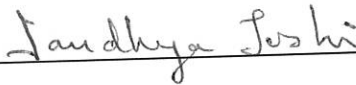
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Date: July 30, 2008

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as a university advisor.

Name: Dr. Sandhya Joshie

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Date: July 30, 2008

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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of
Social Work**

at

Graduate School of Social work, Addis Ababa University

Advisor: Dr. Sandhya Joshi

Co-Advisor: Wzo. Serkalem Bekele

Submitted by: Wzt. Rediet Mesfin

**Addis Ababa
Ethiopia
July 2008**

Addis Ababa University
Graduate School of Social Work

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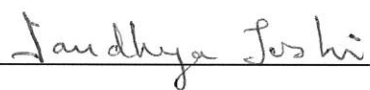
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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Violence Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Right of the Child
EDHS	Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopia
FGAE	Family Guidance Association Ethiopia
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
HTP	Harmful Traditional Practices
IAC	Inter-African Committee
ICESCR	International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NCTPE	National Committee on Traditional Practices in Ethiopia
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
REWA	Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association
SNNPR	Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples' Region
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Fund for Children
WHO	World Health Organization

Abstract

Early marriage is highly prevalent in Ethiopia. It can have several harmful effects on the overall well being of a girl child who is not mentally, psychologically, emotionally or physically prepared for a marriage life. Divorce rate in Ethiopia is also high.

Early marriage is widely practiced in Amhara. Not only early marriage but research also shows that marriages in Amhara last on average about seven years and first marriages even less (about four years). Nevertheless, the relationship and the intensity of the problem has not been identified particularly for girls in Amhara region where the problem is very high.

Therefore, this paper presents the result of a qualitative assessment done on girls in Mecha Woreda, Amhara region to explore the relationship between early marriage and divorce. The study is believed will enable to create awareness on the relationship between early marriage and divorce.

Acknowledgment

In conducting this research, I have worked with a number of people whose contribution in assorted ways deserved special mention. It is my pleasure to convey my gratitude to the following people for the support they gave me.

I would like to start my appreciation by thanking my advisors Dr. Sandhya Joshi and Wzo. Serkalem Bekele for their advice, supervision and guidance from the very early stage of this research. They have exceptionally inspired and enriched my growth as a student and professional social worker. It was a great pleasure to work with both of them.

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Finally, I would like to thank everybody who was important to the successful completion of this thesis, as well as expressing my apology for those that I could not mention all of you personally one by one. I could not have done it without all of you.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background

Ethiopia is an ancient country with a rich diversity of peoples and languages, proud of their traditions and independence. Ethiopia is also a country of various ethnic groups with diversified cultural and traditional practices. Some of these practices are very useful to maintain the identity and social cohesion of the society. On the other hand there are a range of harmful traditional and cultural practices that have negative impact on the society, particularly on women and children. These traditional practices particularly affect women to effectively exercise their human rights in their social, economic, cultural and political life.

Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) are deep-rooted in the country and are passed from generation to generation. There are different types of HTPs in Ethiopia. Among the major ones are Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), early marriage, marriage by abduction, widow inheritance and the like. According to the National Policy on Women that was issued by the Transitional Government of Ethiopia in 1993, sixty percent of the Ethiopian population is affected by a number of harmful traditional practices of which women's share of victimization is by far greater (Office of the Prime Minister, 1993; p 17)

Early marriage is the marriage of children and adolescents below the age of 18. WHO defines adolescence as a period of gradual transition from childhood to adulthood as the age group ranging from 10–19. On this basis any marriage before 18 will clearly be early marriage.

The Revised Family Code under Article 7 specifies the legal marriage age of both boys and girls as follows: “Neither a man nor a women who has not attained the full age of eighteen years shall conclude marriage” (FDRE, 2000).

In early marriage marital partners are chosen by others based on considerations other than pre-existing mutual attention of partners. Usually, the parents of the marital partners arrange a future marriage without the consent of the partners and with little regard on the implications of the marriage.

In Ethiopia early marriage is seen as a way to improve the economic status of the family, to strengthen ties between families, to ensure that girls are virgins when they marry and to avoid the possibility of a girl reaching an age where she is no longer desirable to be a wife.

As early marriage is highly prevalent in Ethiopia, the country has also one of the highest rates of divorce in the world and a substantial numbers of adolescents are already divorced. Tilson and Larson stated in their survey that forty five percent of first marriages in Ethiopia end in divorce within 30 years, and two-thirds of women who get divorced do so within the first 5 years of marriage (Tilson & Larson, 2000; p 355).

This qualitative survey will try to assess the relationship between early marriage and divorce in Mecha Woreda, Amhara Region. Early marriage was selected for this study because the prevalence of this practice and divorce are very high in the Amhara Region. Gojjam has a higher proportion of women who marry at very early ages so it

was expected that women from Gojjam would have a higher divorce rate than women from Addis Ababa or other regions. (Tilson & Larson, 2000; p 367).

Statement of the problem

Early marriage is widely practiced in many parts of the country. The practice occurs in its most extreme forms in Northern Ethiopia, where girls are married as young as eight or nine years of age. In some instances, they are even pledged at birth.

However, the rates of early marriage in Amhara and Tigray regions are higher than the national average (82% in Amhara; 79% in Tigray) while its prevalence in Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella & Afar Regions is 64% (NCTPE 2003; p139). This research deals with an area where the highest prevalence rate of early marriage is observed in Amhara Region - Mecha Woreda.. Mecha Woreda is one of the areas whereby early marriage is widely exercised and the related problems are faced by the girls.

There are many causes of early marriage in Ethiopia. When asked about the causes of early marriage an expert said “I think culture and poverty are the two main causes of early marriage. People are very resistant to change. The society also does not have the financial capability to send children to school or even to fulfill their need. So they prefer to marry them off. In our society marriage is also one way of improving the economic status of the girl and even the family. Moreover they believe that girls should be virgins when they marry. So they marry them off at a very young age to ensure that the girls are virgin”.

When seen from social, health, human rights, and other perspectives, early marriage is perceived as harmful. Early marriage can cause serious harm to children and girls. Different studies revealed that the consequences of early marriage might be HIV/AIDS, fistula, abuse, isolation, inability to plan families, denial of access to education and serious harm on the well-being of girls and children.

Early marriage typically coincides with child bearing at a young age. Early pregnancy poses great health risks for a young woman, as well as for the infant, if she carries the pregnancy to term. These risks are exacerbated by poverty and inadequate access to maternal and child health services. (Yemen Times - 15 February 2008)

The interview conducted by the researcher with early married couples, key informants and experts also shows that children in Amhara region get married as young as 8 years old. Thus, this poses health risk for both the child mother and her children.

Moreover, those who marry at a young age will likely find motherhood the sole focus of their lives at the expense of development in other areas such as formal education and training for employment, work experience and personal growth.

The interview the researcher conducted also strengthens this idea. Since they neither go to formal nor get informal education their vision is limited to what they do at home and about having cows, clothes and shoes.

Socio-economic development is a development which entails numerous changes in society, ranging from industrialization, urbanization, economic growth, developments in transportation and communication technologies, and structural

changes in the labor force to intellectual change associated with the spread of formal schooling (Journal of Personality and Social Psychology). Attaining these is unthinkable in a situation where the child wife does not get access to education and is limited to household activities. And the society supports the fact that girls should be limited to household activities. In the interview the researcher conducted with a villager, he said “it is not good that girls go to school and that they marry the guy they choose”. He also added “the good culture (early marriage which is arranged by the parents) we had from the Emperors’ times is ruined.”

Increased risk of divorce is among the negative consequences of early marriage. Divorce is a direct consequence of early marriage (NCTPE, 2003; p145). Yemen Times in its latest publication on 15 February 2008 also stated that a first marriage at an early age is associated in the long term with a higher probability of divorce and separation (Yemen Times, 2008).

According to an expert interviewed by the researcher on this area “marriages are most susceptible to divorce in the early years of marriage, the main reasons being like the girls will not be matured and are not ready to take all the burdens. They also have other needs other than marriage like education and even playing with their peers. Sex will also be painful for them. Most of the girls are having forced sex before the age of puberty. They give birth and do not know how to take care of their children. Also knowing and choosing your partner plays a big role. Parents choose husbands for the girls and the men are usually twice the age of the girls. The couple does not see each other before the day of their wedding. In general, the girls would not have the

emotional and social preparedness to be married so they will end up divorcing after a while”.

Similar to early marriage, divorce has also been common in Ethiopia. Further to this Tilson’s and Larsen’s study on divorce in Ethiopia shows that 45 percent of marriages in Ethiopia end in divorce within 30 years; 28 percent of first marriages end in divorce within the first five years; 34 percent within 10 years; and 40 percent within 20 years (Tilson and Larsen, 2000; p 360).

Divorce is high among the Amhara in general. As Pankhurst states “the most remarkable feature of Amhara the household is the frequency of divorce and its correlation in high incidence of serial marriages in what is strongly Christian community” (NCTPE, 2003; p130). Divorce and remarriage are very frequent in the Amhara region and early marriage is associated with high rates of divorce and remarriage in the region.

Marriage dissolution creates social and economic challenges for women who, as single parents, often assume full responsibility for dependent family members (Yemen Times - 15 February 2008). Thus the negative consequences of divorce which result from early marriage can be classified in to two categories. First, divorce brings to an end the positive effects of marriage on the lives of adults and children. Secondly, divorce is usually evidence of marital distress, and marital conflict, compounded by the social and emotional upheaval of the divorce process with negative effects on the psychological and physiological functioning of the whole family.

In the Amhara region, according to the expert interviewed, those who get divorced migrate to work as house maids or in the worst circumstances become prostitutes in nearby towns such as Bahirdar and Debremarkos or even in Addis Ababa. Those who want to go back to school after divorce fail to do so because of the social stigma.

According to Pankhurst, in his anthropological research, there are many factors involved in the dissolution of marriage. The most common reasons women cited for dissolving their marriage were barrenness, husbands beating and ill-treating them, wasting money, adultery, exerting too much control over their activities, forced sexual intercourse, homesickness, and a big difference in age. The most common reasons that men cited were barrenness, wives' adultery, not keeping house properly, and wives not obeying them or challenging their authority (Pankhurst, 1992a as cited in Tilson & Larsen 2000; p 357)

According to Sonal Panse (5/19/2007 Buzzle.com), the most frequently cited reasons for causing divorce are lack of maturity and intellectual incompatibility. The female children, as pointed out above, are made to marry at an age as young as 8 years old in Mecha Woreda when they are not matured enough to realize what they are getting into. As to the information gathered from the key informants and the experts, the vast majority of men get married having reached the age of maturity and most of the boys are also sent to school becoming literate. Thus a clear intellectual incompatibility is observed.

According to the same publication by Sonal Panse , (5/19/2007 Buzzle.com), the other most frequently cited reasons for causing divorce are insistence of sticking to traditional roles and not allowing room for personal growth. In Mecha Woreda, according to the interview conducted, the society expects girls to perform all the household activities and take care of the husband and children. No room is given to what the wives want to do with their lives. According to the interview conducted, the needs of the children is to get education, have fun and play with their friends since they are very young .But since they are afraid of aggravating the problem by seeking divorce they suffer. They also don't go for divorce because of fear of societal discrimination and to conform to societal expectations and values. Even in the interview conducted, a child wife said that since her mother is going to be disappointed she would stay with her husband. So at the expense of their interest they undergo pain to get acceptance in the society.

Even those that break societal expectation and move out face a lot of problems. Regarding this, one of the early married girls interviewed reported “after I left my husband I went back to my mother. She did not even want to hear about my problems. When I told her that I run away from my husband she told me to go back immediately. I cried and begged her but she took me back to him”. She had to leave her husband again because he kept on harassing her. She explained her experience as follows. “My mother did not know what to do except screaming when she saw me again. I showed her my bruises and all she said was “What would people say? You want my neighbors to laugh at me and you? What kind of future would you like to have? Nobody would

marry you again. You are a divorcee.” The villagers reinforced what she heard from her mother.

Other researches done on the causes of divorce also reveal that divorces often happen because people rarely discuss their expectations in detail prior to marriage. They are not also willing to work on their marriages afterwards, and would like quick solutions rather than having to resolve issues. People have gotten divorced for trivial reasons like snoring. (Sonal Panse; 5/19/2007, Buzzle.com). As to the information collected from early married girls, key informants and experts, the girls do not get the chance to see their husbands before their wedding day let alone discuss their expectations prior to marriage. One of the early married girls said “I did not know my husband before. Even on our wedding day, I did not know that it was him until I was forced to sleep with him on my wedding night”.

The theory of marriage tells us that marriage formality is viewed as an indication of commitment and loyalty. The fact that a particular man and woman are bound by a formal marriage, instead of living together informally, could indicate that the woman is given a higher value. According to this theory people are viewed as suppliers of spousal labor. In most cultures such spousal labor includes parenthood services, food preparation and homemaking. Additional forms of spousal labor vary widely from one culture to the other.

Spousal labor is supplied in return for compensation; this phenomenon is called quasi-wage. Quasi-wages for spousal labor are partially determined by conditions in markets for spousal labor. In turn, the market-determined component of the quasi-

wage for women's spousal labor is determined at the intersection of the aggregate demand and supply in the market for women's spousal labor. Likewise, men supply spousal labor and get compensated for it.

A net income transfer is expected to occur from the husband to the wife to the extent that the value of her spousal labor exceeds the value of his spousal labor. The form in which wives are compensated for their labor also differs cross-culturally. In most cultures, it includes a material component, often taking the form of provision of shelter and basic goods by the husband for the wife's benefit. (Eugene Choo and Aloysius Siow, December 12 2005).

In Mecha Woreda, from the interview the researcher conducted, the girls have interest to go to school but most of them are barred as they are married and have to satisfy almost every interest of their husbands'. This conflict of interest creates unhappiness in marriage, resulting in separation of the marriage relation as their labor is not paid of. An early married girl said "I also want to go to school like my friends. I am only 14 years old and I am not ready to get married. When my friends go to school I cook or do handicrafts and I do whatever there is to be done".

The Ethiopian Constitution prohibits marriage of both females and males before the age of 18. Though the Ethiopian law does not thus provide for discrepancy, in reality the age of marriage for boys and girls is very different. According to the Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS 2005), men enter into first marriage almost 8 years later than women; the median age at first marriage for men aged 25-29 is 23.8 years (EDHS, 2005; p 82-83). The other problem observed is with

the law and societal acceptance to the law made. Having a law which prohibits early marriage is a major step taken ahead.

In an interview, a key informant shows that though the community knows what the law says they do not want to comply with it saying it is spoiling the generation and they even criticize it. The society still believes in early marriage. But the rule forbids them not to do so.

Law has also been used as a mechanism for social change. The real solution to the problem, however, rests not with having law or law enforcement but on the changing the attitude of the public in eliminating lawlessness by giving full support to the honest and vigorous efforts of all public servants. (Crime and crime intervention, 1947. pg 5). One of the villager reported 'we tried to marry our daughters', we still try to do it in secret because it was illegal but we ended up in jail '. "Appreciating the existence of the law which prohibits early marriage and awareness creating should also be the center of focus. But since creating awareness in Amhara region and getting the acceptance of the society is not attained, the society is going in the opposite path from the law" said an interviewed law professional.

Marriage as it is defined by most literatures is a partnership which involves a give and take relationship filled with help, understanding, filling once gap and tolerating each other. It also goes with out saying that healthy, supportive marriages promote personal health and well-being. Whereas according to one of the interviewee in Mecha Woreda, "the sole reason why the man married the girl was so that she could cook for him". The girls are involved in all aspects of their society's life. They are both

producers and procreators and they are also active participants in the social, political, and cultural activities of their communities. This is also the instance in marriage they are expected to perform all the activities like cooking, taking care of their husband and children as explained above. Whereas, marriage takes more than that: understanding one another, filling each other's gap and tolerance. According to the researcher ultimate goal of marrying a wife should not be limited to ones desire to get a cook.

According to the interview done with an expert also besides the separation of the spouses the girls face lasting psychological and physical damage. What the expert witnessed would strengthen this idea: a girl that got married at early age and gave birth faced trauma resulting from early delivery and later her body remained paralyzed. As a result, her husband sent her back to her parents, eventually abandoning her completely and taking another wife. After years of suffering her health improved but she found life extremely difficult. Leaving her child with her parents, she moved to a town and ended up as a sex worker. Currently, she is HIV positive. Such other untold stories are happening in the area.

Generally, though few studies have been done to show consequences of early marriage on divorce, the intensity of the problem particularly on girls in Amhara region where the problem is very high has not been researched well. And also the relationship between early marriage and divorce is not fully understood as little research is conducted on this subject. Hence, this research is expected to explore the relationship between early marriage and divorce in Mecha Woreda, Amhara region.

Research question

Is there a relationship between early marriage and divorce? If yes, what is its nature?

Objectives of the study

The general objective of the study is to explore the relationship between early marriage and divorce in Mecha Woreda, Amhara region. The study will also have the following specific objectives

- To identify the cultural and socio economic factors leading to early marriage in Mecha Woreda;
- To identify factors which lead to divorce as a result of early marriage Mecha Woreda;
- To identify the current status of under age married and divorced girls in Mecha Woreda;
- To identify current interventions on early marriage (if any);

Factors that motivate each group either to still stay married or to divorce and any link with regard to their age will be assessed in the process.

Significance of the study

Very few studies have been done on the relationship between early marriage and divorce. There is ample information on early marriage and divorce unconnectedly and of a general nature; however, the relationship and the intensity of the problem has not been identified particularly for girls in Amhara region where the problem is very high.

Therefore, the study will identify the relationship between early marriage and divorce on girls in Mecha Woreda, Amhara region. The study will also enable to create awareness on early marriage and divorce.

There are few interventions on early marriage in Mecaha Woreda. Therefore, the study will also assess whether the existing interventions are effective and based on the need of the children and girls. It will also try to suggest possible need based solutions to the problems in relation to early marriage and divorce.

Scope and rationale for the study in Amhara

The scope of the study will be limited to Mecha Woreda, Amhara region where early marriage is highly prevalent. Divorce rate in the same region is also very high.

Although boys are also affected by early marriage, the impact of early marriage upon girls is by far larger and the intensity of the problem is severe. Therefore, the scope of the study will be limited to girls.

CHAPTER TWO

Research Design and Methodology

It can be appreciated that both qualitative and quantitative analyses have something to contribute. But for the sake of this research qualitative method is employed. The aim of qualitative method is to give a complete and detail description. Qualitative method allows for fine distinctions to be drawn because it is not necessary to shoehorn the data into a finite number of classifications. Ambiguities, which are inherent in human language, can be recognized in the over all analysis. But quantitative method is less rich and precise than that obtained from qualitative analysis. So in some cases quantitative method is therefore an idealization of the data gathered. Also it is evident that qualitative and quantitative research methods are frequently presented as distinct and polarized choices for a research methodology. Broadly speaking we can say that qualitative research involves analysis of words, pictures or objects while quantitative research involves the analysis of numerical data (corpus data quantitative Vs. quantitative). Other reasons why qualitative research is chosen over quantitative method are the following:

- Emphasizes processes and meanings;
- Be less interested in measurement;
- Stress the social construction of reality;
- Consider the nature of the relationship between the researched and researcher;
- Consider the context and situations at hand;
- Acknowledge the value laden nature of inquiry;
- Be ideographic- importance of the individual case;

And qualitative method also helps a researcher to

- Obtain a more realistic feel of the world that cannot be experienced in the numerical data and statistical analysis used in quantitative research;
- Flexible ways to perform data collection, subsequent analysis, and interpretation of collected information;
- Provide a holistic view of the phenomena under investigation;
- Ability to interact with the research subjects in their own language and on their own terms; and
- Descriptive capability based on primary and unstructured data.

Therefore, because of the factors mentioned above and in order to clearly show the lively conditions of underage married girls and divorced early married girls in Mecha Woreda, it is found to be appropriate to use qualitative method.

Sampling

Area Sampling is a procedure in which the final units to be included in the samples are obtained by first sampling among larger units, called clusters, in which the smaller sampling units are contained. A series of sampling stages are involved, working down from cluster to smaller ones (Applied Social Research: 134). Thus Amhara region is selected out of the fourteen regions in Ethiopia because of the fact that early marriage and divorce are most prevalent in the area.

Purposive sampling is a sampling technique used by an investigator whereby he/she uses their judgmental and prior knowledge to choose people for the sample who would best serve purposes of the study (Applied Social Research: 144). Purposive sampling technique has been used to select Mecha Woreda in West Gojjam, from Amhara region. Purposive sampling is selected because of different reasons in terms of achieving representation of the setting. (Creswell 2002: 194-196). Though the main objective of the research is not representation this will help to get information by providing fair data with equal chance to every target and also will provide confidence on the conclusion of the data. The other goal of purposive sampling is to establish comparison to eliminate reasons for the difference between settings and individuals. (Maxwell & Looms, 2002).

Time constraint to conduct the research and feasibility are the other reasons why the researcher used such technique. Due to the researcher's personal exposure to the area which has made finding contact persons and availability of samples easier, purposive sampling has been selected.

Sampling Frame

The sampling frame used was a registration form that West Gojjam Youth and Sports Bureau is using to register girls in Mecha Woreda that are between 10 and 18 years old; some still married and some divorced. The bureau started registration since 2007. There were about 3,735 girls registered until data was collected for this research. The registration form consists of information such as name, physical address, family

history, educational status, School's name (for students) and marital status (single, married, divorced or widowed).

Stratified random sampling was used to stratify the girls into two sub populations. Stratified sampling other than treating the whole population as a unitary system divides it into smaller sub groups prior to drawing the samples. This helped to reduce sampling errors because the more homogeneous a population on the variables being studied is the smaller the sample size needs to represent it accurately. Thus it helped each sub sample to become more homogeneous by eliminating the variation on the variables that is used for stratifying. (Applied Social Research:130). Thus the relevant stratification criteria was those girls who got married at early age and later divorced and those girls who are under age and still married. Girls that are divorced and girls that are still married under age were listed separately.

Stratified sampling has been selected from other sampling methods for reasons like it focuses on important subpopulations and ignores irrelevant ones; it also improves the accuracy of estimation and it is efficient. This is made to give equal opportunity to each group and get their perception on the area to be addressed. The consideration of different groups is believed reduced bias on the study.

From each stratum i.e. divorced early married girls and married underage girls the researcher selected a total of 40 girls for interview i.e. 20 girls from each married and divorced girls using simple random sampling. And also for the FGDs, a total of 48 girls i.e. 24 girls (3 groups) were selected from each stratum. Simple random sampling gives equal probability of being chosen for the sample (Applied Social Research: 29).

In this regard the sample selection was representative and also the girls were given equal chance of being selected. It also minimized researcher's bias. Therefore a total of 88 girls were used as sample to conduct the study.

Tools of data collection

Three qualitative data gathering instruments have been employed to collect data; *Semi structured interview*: Semi structured interview unlike structured interview has a formalized and limited set of questions. A semi-structured interview is flexible: it allowed new questions to be brought up during the interview based on the response of the interviewee. This has been selected because structured interview only reflects researcher's idea and as a result respondents' valuable ideas would be ignored. Thus for the purpose of this idea semi structured interview has been chosen. The interview has been carried out with randomly selected under age still married girls and currently divorced girls from the sample. The interview provided an opportunity to the interviewer to ask questions and get clarifications. It also permitted depth in response which was not possible through the FGD.

In order to supplement the data gathered through the semi structured interview, FGD has been conducted. Three FGDs for each group comprising of divorced girls who got married under age and those girls who are under age and still married have been conducted. A maximum of 8 girls participated in one group who fall into 2 categories.

FGD is advantageous because it is flexible, minimum cost and can provide quick results. Thus, FGD is chosen to probe respondents to tell the reality since they

are homogeneous groups more idea was expected to be raised and at last collective solution to be obtained. One of the disadvantages of FGD is it would ignore quite people in the process but according to Duane R.monette et al, if FGD is handled well, a high level of participation will be achieved and thus elicit reactions that might not be in one to one interview setting would be obtained .It has also the advantages of using the interaction between people to stimulate ideas and encourage group members to participate.

Key informant interview has been held with people who are in a position to provide a wide spectrum of general opinion and professional views like experts on early marriage, divorce and law, religious leaders from both Muslim and Christian, teachers, community, Idir and Woreda leaders.

Participant observation-The researcher tried to observe the life style of the underage married girls by living with one family member. This helped the researcher to describe the general daily activities and events in the girls' day to day life.

Field work has been carried out to collect the data in months of April and May 2008.

Pre test

The researcher did pre testing in Mecha Woreda. The pre test helped the researcher to detect if questions employed were correct and understandable and also allowed the researcher to make necessary corrections. The pre test also helped the researcher to understand the whole process. Ten individuals were interviewed in

March. The researcher tried to assess if the questions raised were also culture sensitive.

Data Analysis

The data analysis as most qualitative research began during data collection. Many texts on qualitative data analysis begin their discussion with what to do after data have been collected. If data analysis began only after the data have been collected, researchers would have missed many valuable opportunities that could be taken only at the same time as they are collecting their data. Further during data analysis the researcher typically discovered and noticed unanticipated issues that have arisen early in the data collection. If data analysis was left until afterwards these issues would not be noticed during data collection. (Kelleheae (1993), mason (1996), Daly et al.(1997), Denzin (1997) and rice and Ezzy (1999).

Postmodernist and poststructuralist thought can be seen as at least partially consistent with this understanding of the interpretation of data collection and analysis (Becker & McCall 1990; Denzin 1997). They argue that researches should be seen more as contributions to ongoing conversations about a research issue rather than as final analysis of the 'truth'. (Lather, 1993). Interpretation of meaning and experience is essential to qualitative research.

Game (1991) argues that this makes it to be objective and be dependant on the researcher and is incompatible in research. But as Becker & Mc Call (1990) symbolic interactions emphasize that in order to understand social life, researchers must examine the meanings that shape the processes of interaction. The objective of

qualitative research is to allow the voice of the other people to be researched and to inform the researcher. This happens when the researched people directly communicate with us and this supports the on spot analysis. And as to Way, research is an inherently relational process that involves shared stories, actual bodies, and real voices (Way, 1999: 704).

But this does not mean integrating on spot data collection and data analysis is enough. So we need to use others analysis in addition to it for analyzing the information of the interview result.

So in addition to the on spot analysis, team meetings and peer debriefing have been done to look at the gaps and reflect on the overall process

Then content analysis has been carried out for;

- Identification of the population from which units are sampled;
- Defines the units of analysis ;
- Categorizing;

This has been selected because content analysis tends to be used in conjunction with other forms of data analysis that are more inductive and sensitive to emergent categories and interpretations and is also useful in confirming or testing a pre existing theory. Then all the contents were analyzed after they are all coded. Open coding was used i.e. they were formed after looking at the data. Then axial and selective coding have been used to enable the development of an argument around which the research output is organized.

Open coding involves exploring the data, identifying the units of analysis, code for meanings, feelings and action, make metaphors for data, experiment with codes, compare and contrast events, actions and feelings, break codes into subcategories and integrate codes into more inclusive codes and identify the properties of codes as follows;

Axial Coding

- Explore the codes
- Examine the relationship between the codes
- Specify the conditions associated with a code
- Review data to confirm associations and new codes
- Compare codes with preexisting theory

Selective Coding

- Identify the core code or central story in the analysis
- Examine the relationship between the core code and other codes
- Compare coding scheme with preexisting hypothesis

No computer program has been used because as to Douglas (2002) qualitative data analysis cannot be done by a computer. It only facilitates the analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

Literature review

General overview of women in Ethiopia

Ethiopian women are actively involved in all aspects of their society's life. Women are both producers and procreators and they are also active participants in the social, political, and cultural activities of their communities. However the varied and important roles they play have not always been recognized. The discriminatory political, economic, cultural and social rules and regulations prevailing in Ethiopia have barred women from enjoying the fruits of their labor. Without equal opportunities, they have lagged behind men in all fields of self-advancement.

Economic development is unthinkable without the participation of women. In some economic sectors women even constitute a proportionally larger group of the labor force than men. However, because their participation in the economy has not been valued, Ethiopian women have not received their fair share of the nation's wealth.

Background

Before the 1974 Revolution, women's organized activities were run mainly by non-governmental bodies such as the Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association, the Ethiopian Officer's Wives Association, and the Ethiopian Female Students' Association. These Associations were, however, limited in scope, and only existed in the cities. They

had little or no impact on government policies, laws, regulations or development programs.

In 1974, the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association (REWA) was established by proclamation, but this organization was too monolithic and too close to the Derg to be of any real use to women. The purpose of its establishment was, in fact, the consolidation of the Derg's power. Promoting the interests of women was not high on its agenda nor was it designed to influence government policies or help women benefit from development programs. As a result there was little improvement in the lives of Ethiopian women, whether in the social, economic or political sphere, especially of those who lived in the rural areas.

Although a few development agencies, particularly NGOs engaged in relief and rehabilitation work, had attempted to incorporate women's issues into their work programs, they did not show the expected results. This was because the previous government had not given women's development the priority it deserved and therefore had not created a conducive atmosphere for development initiatives for women.

During the civil war Ethiopian women made a unique contribution, both as fighters and as civilian supporters, to challenging and ousting the brutal and incompetent regime of the Derg, as well as during the famine, displacements, and drought conditions which accompanied it. Their participation in these recent events has helped to create the impetus for giving special attention to women.

Ethiopian women in the 1990s

Soon after the downfall of the Derg regime, the various political and national organizations, setting aside their differences, formed a Transitional Government whose principles were set out in a Charter in which peace was the main principle of governance. Both the Transitional Government and the first elected Government in 1995, comparatively has given priority to the speeding up of equality between men and women.

Until recently, governments in Ethiopia have not had any policy on women's affairs. Hence they have not been seen as important potential beneficiaries of government development programs. Although women have made substantial contributions to the struggle Ethiopian people have waged to ensure their rights and freedoms, their struggle up to now has not been sufficiently institutionalized.

Women's demand to participate actively in national development and to exercise their right to enjoy its fruits is now relatively receiving support in government and local communities.

Defining terms

Marriage is a social institution that unites people in a special form of mutual dependencies for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family.

A pragmatic ("Arranged") marriage is facilitated by formal procedures of family or group politics (FGAE, 2005; p 9). The authority could be parents, family, a religious figure or a consensus.

Early marriage (Child marriage) is the marriage of children and adolescents below the age of 18.

Family (Sociology) is a basic social group (mostly a group of relatives) united through bonds of kinship or marriage, both, or adoption present in all societies. Ideally, the family provides its members with protection, companionship, security and socialization.

Early marriage in Ethiopia

The Inter-African Committee (IAC) on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children states that early marriage is “ any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years, before the girl is physically, physiologically and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and child bearing”.

Early marriage is highly prevalent in Ethiopia. It is practiced both by Christian and Muslim communities. Particularly, it is a serious problem for some of the regions like Amhara, Tigray and Benishangul Gumuz.

Early marriage is widely practiced in Amhara – 82 percent. Almost all literatures reviewed unequivocally documented the high prevalence of the practice in Amhara. According to EDHS 2005, in Amhara 15 percent of ever-married woman were married before the age 12. The mean age at first marriage was 14.5 years; about 44 percent of urban and 53 percent of rural ever-married women were first married between 12 and 15 years. Only 16.2 percent rural women and 26.6 percent of urban women were married at the age of 18 and older. More than one third of the ever-

married women had been married at least twice and 14 percent of these women had been married three or more times. The majority of these women are not involved in any economic activities and only 15 percent are educated beyond primary level. The majority of the women had married men older than themselves with age difference of 10 years and more and they were pressured to marry largely by their parents (EDHS 2005: 83).

Some of the girls are forced into marriage at a very young age and others are very young to make an informed decision about their marriage partner. Some argue that some girls have been consented to be the bride. But in reality consent can not be considered full when it is done by children who are under 18 years of age as they cannot fully understand the implications of marriage.

In Gojjam, Ethiopia, marriages may be imposed from birth, with the girl sent to her future husband's home at around the age of seven to begin her integration in with her marriage family (UNICEF, 2001: 8)

Even when girls are still children- often are defined solely as wives and mothers and are exposed to responsibilities and risks for which they are often not physically or mentally prepared" (ICRW, 2003:16)

In the vast majority of countries the law grants women the right to consent. Only in Cameroon, Jordan, Morocco, Uganda and Yemen are women specifically not granted by law the right to 'full free and informed consent to the marriage' (UNICEF, 2001: p8)

Types of early marriage

The followings are different types of early marriage arrangements in Ethiopia; (EGLDAM, 2005: p27)

- i) *Promissory marriage*: is an oral promise made by two families to give each other the children in marriage right after or even before the children are born.
- ii) *Child marriage* – when children under the age of ten are wedded either the child bride is given to her in laws immediately after the wedding ceremony or the girl stays with her parents until such times as the two families agree that she is mature enough to go and live with her husband.
- iii) *Early adolescent marriage*: this takes place between the age of 10-15 years, i.e. at the start of puberty.

According to “Early Marriage in Ethiopia: law and social reality” publication by UNIFEM et al there is also additional fourth type of early marriage which is late adolescent marriage which takes place between the ages of 15 to 18. (UNIFEM et al, 2005: 5).

Causes of early marriage

Early marriage in Ethiopia is caused by many reasons. Pathfinder’s study on the causes and consequences of early marriage in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia, explained some of the causes of early marriage as follows (Pathfinder & USAID, 2006: p33-35)

During feudalism, elites used marriage as a means to establish or strengthen relationships with the bride's or bridegroom's family to ensure social, economic or political benefits. Marriage was also used to ease tensions between two quarreling families. Early marriage in Ethiopia is also seen as a way to improve the economic status of the family. Poverty forces some families to marry their daughters at a very young age. In some places, parents approve and practice early marriage because they are not aware or are ignorant of its negative consequences upon their daughters.

Moreover, early marriage is done for traditional values such as; in order to maintain the family's good name and social standing; personal interest (mostly among fathers) to create bonds or relationships and families of choice; fear that the girl might become unmarriageable later in life; the need to ensure virginity of the girls at the time of marriage; the cultural value and personal importance of witnessing the marriage of one's children (sons and daughters) and grandchildren. This is considered as a mark of manhood/fatherhood.

During an exploration interview conducted by the researcher, one community leader said "these days it is being advocated that girls should go to school even at the age of 15. And the parents have been harmed because in our tradition a girl should get married to a man that has similar family background, clan and economic status like her family. But now a days the girls go to school and fall in love with cute guys disregarding his family background and economic status. Even sometimes the girls will come home pregnant. Had they been married very young, the parents would have been able to choose the right guy for them."

Early marriage is a form of community support system where parents use to form kinship and clan ties (FGAE, 2005: p5). Though early marriage has several negative consequences, yet many societies support the idea that girls should get married early.

Early marriage is prohibited in the existing family code but the law is condoned by the community and religious leaders. In a recent survey conducted by Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia (FGAE) also, many key informants of the study in all the studied sites including young husbands argue that girls are better off if married early (FGAE, 2005; p 5).

The most important reason to marry a daughter early is to ensure her chastity. Keeping brides young also ensures their obedience and subservience and potentially maximizes child bearing. Marriage also enhances social alliances and the status of families (UNFPA, 2007; leaflet).

Consequences of early marriage

Early marriage can have several harmful effects on the overall well being of a girl child who is not mentally, psychologically, emotionally or physically prepared for a married life. Early marriage can be a violation of children's basic rights - to a childhood, to an education, to good health and to make decisions about their own lives.

The physical, emotional and social effects of early marriage are varied. Instability of marriage, impacts on the health of the women, impacts upon education and impact on the wellbeing of children are among the major ones. Several researches/surveys have tried to show the consequence of early marriage as follows;

For both girls and boys, early marriage has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impacts like cutting of educational opportunity and chances of personal growth. For girls, in addition, it will almost certainly mean premature pregnancy and child bearing, and is likely to lead to a life time of domestic and sexual subservience over which they have no control (UNICEF, 2001;2).

The consequences of Early Marriage identified include: curtailment of education, early pregnancy and child bearing, health related problems such as fistula, domestic violence, marriage breakdown, high fertility, and threats to the well being of children (Pathfinder & USAID, 2006: 39)

Early marriage is a powerful disincentive to girls' educational opportunities: it is a threat to their reproductive health: and it is highly risky for both mother and child, for adolescent girls are physically, mentally and emotionally unprepared for child birth (UNICEF, 2001:19)

Marrying a child is a human right violation which discriminates against girls by limiting their development and potential and putting them at risk of reproductive ill health including mortality. There is a strong relationship between child marriages, low educational levels, poverty and health risks including exposure to HIV and obstetric fistula (FGAE, 2005: 5).

Younger women and girls are twice as likely to die in child birth as women who are over 20 years of age, while early marriage also increases the likelihood of multiple births, further increase their chances of mortality (FGAE, 2005: 5).

Among the ever-migrated in migrant girls, half of the girls were divorced which undoubtedly contributed to their moving to Addis Ababa. Impending or threatened forced marriage was a significant reason why girls came to Addis Ababa, but it was not a reason given by boys. Many girls did not want to be forced into marriage and so ran away to Addis Ababa (Population Council and UNICEF, p8-9)

A major negative consequence of early marriage is instability, (disagreement and eventual divorce or separation) ((Pathfinder & USAID, 2006: 39).

International and national instruments and laws on early marriage

Age at marriage and the right to exercise marital consent has been recognized by many international instruments and national laws. Despite international agreements and national laws forbid early marriage, the practice is high which as a result many young girls are denied of their human rights.

The right to free and full consent to a marriage is recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 16 of UDHR states that “marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending parties.”

Article 16.1 of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW) prescribes equally for men and women- a) “the same right to enter into marriage” b) “the same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with the free and full consent”

Article 16.2 of CEDAW also states that “the betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect and all necessary action including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage.”

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines children as people under the age of 18. Article 3 of the same convention requires that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children and Article 24:3 obliges States to take measures to abolish traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children. Many provisions of CRC have some relevance to the issue of early marriage. Some of the major ones are stated below;

Article 1: “A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child majority is attained earlier.”

Article 3(1): “In all actions concerning children...the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration”.

Article 6(2): “States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child”.

Article 12(1): the entitlement of the child to freely express his/her views in all matters that affect him/her.

Article 19(1): The right to be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment, or exploitation including sexual abuse.

Article 24: The right to health and the duty of States Parties to take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.

Article 34: The right of children to protection from all forms of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.

Article 36: The right to protection from all forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action (PoA) refers specifically and repeatedly to the need to increase age at marriage. It recommends efforts to eliminate coercion and discrimination related to child marriage, to enforce minimum age at marriage laws, and generate social support for these laws by providing educational and employment opportunities to girls and young women.

Paragraph 9 of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action promoted by the Fourth World Conference on Women reaffirm the government's commitment as "ensure the full implementation of the human rights of women and of girl child as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms".

Article 10(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) states that "the widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family...particularly for its establishment and while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children. Marriage must be entered into with the free consent of the intending spouses."

Article XXI of the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child states 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 eighteen years.

Ethiopia has ratified most of the basic human rights instruments and the major conventions on women's and children's rights including CEDAW, CESC, CCPR, CRC, The African Charter on Human and People's Right and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. In addition to these instruments, early marriage violates various other human rights instruments that Ethiopia has ratified.

According to the Fetha Negast, the old law that was in force in parts of Ethiopia for a long time, the primary purpose of marriage are stated as; i) the procreation of offspring in order to preserve the lineage; ii) concupiscence or the desire for carnal union where from come offspring and the cooperation of the husbands and the wife to alleviate the burdens of life.

Parallel with the international instruments that Ethiopia is signatory, several other policy instruments are formulated. Among them are the 1993 Health Policy, the 1994 Social Policy, the 1997 Cultural Policy and the 1998 Policy on HIV/AIDS.

In Ethiopia there is no discrepancy between the minimum age for boys and girls – both is 18 but in reality the age girls marry and boys marry is very different. According to the EDHS 2005, men enter into first marriage almost 8 years later than women; the median age at first marriage for men age 25-29 is 23.8 years (EDHS, 2005; p 82-83).

The Ethiopian Constitution prohibits marriages of both females and males less than 18 years. Article 34 (1) of the Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopia constitution

states that the marriageable age would be define by the appropriate law i.e. Family Law.

Previously the legal age for marriage has been 15 however it has been raised to 18 when the family code was revised. The revised family code (proclamation of 2000), article 7 specifies the legal marriage age of both boys and girls as follows: “Neither a man nor a women who has not attained the full age of eighteen years shall conclude marriage”

The regional state of Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, Gambella, Beneshangul Gumuz and Southern Nations Nationalities People’s Region (SNNPR) and the Federal state (Federally administered cities: Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa) have revised their family laws and marriageable age for both women and men is 18 years old.

The criminal code pursuant to Article 648 penalizes whoever concludes marriage with a minor: where the age of the victim is thirteen years or above, it is punishable with rigorous imprisonment not exceeding three years and where the age of the victim is below thirteen years, it is punishable with rigorous imprisonment not exceeding seven years. According to Article 647, whoever intentionally solemnizes, or contracts, permits or becomes a witness to a marriage forbidden by law is punishable with simple imprisonment not exceeding three years, or fine not exceeding five thousand Birr.

Although early marriage has laws that regulate marriage in terms of minimum age and consent these laws are not enforced enough and are not applied fully and very few prosecutions are brought against law breakers.

In spite of the legal provisions, there is the impression among parents that the laws and their consequences pose little real threat. Mainly, due to the fact that some communities are not aware of the newly adopted criminal code which criminalizes and penalizes the practice.

Another major problem is the fact that birth registration is so irregular or in some cases there is no registration system which will in turn makes it difficult to fully apply the law and penalize the prosecutors.

Teachers complain that local official's deliberately over look under age marriages by certifying marriages for under age girls whom parents report as 18 (FGAE, 2005: 6).

Divorce in Ethiopia

The divorce rate in Ethiopia is high. According to Tilson & Larson, Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of divorce in the world and a substantial numbers of adolescents are already divorced. Forty-five percent of first marriages in Ethiopia end in divorce within 30 years, and two-thirds of women who divorce do so within the first 5 years of marriage (Tilson & Larson, 2000: p 355).

Divorce in Amhara is also very common. H. Pankhurst puts it (as cited by NCTPE, 2003: 130), "The most remarkable feature of Amhara households is the frequency of divorce and its correlation in high incidence of serial marriages." (NCTPE, 2003:130).

Among all ever-married women, the median age at marriage for women who divorce is 14.5 years as compared with a median age of 16.3 years for women who did not divorce (Tilson & Larson, 2000: 361)

Negative consequences of divorce

The negative impact of divorce can be broken down into two main components: first, divorce brings to an end the positive effects of marriage on the lives of adults and children. Secondly, divorce is usually evidence of marital distress, and marital conflict, compounded by the social and emotional upheaval of the divorce process, has negative effects on the psychological and physiological functioning of the whole family.

To address the first component, a significant body of research has documented the benefits of marriage. The positive effects of marriage are thought to stem from the emotional, social, and physical intimacy of the secure spousal relationship. An extensive literature review by Coombs found that “the evidence is consistent with the protection/support hypothesis that a marital partner who provides companionship and psychic aid buffers the individual against physical and emotional pathology. (Coombs 1991)” Married people are at less risk for specific disorders such as alcoholism, as well as having lower overall mortality rates and higher levels of personal happiness, although the benefits of marriage seem to be more significant for men than for women (Coombs, 1991).

Healthy, supportive marriages promote personal health and well-being. Conflicted marriages have the opposite effect, increasing a person’s risk of physical

and psychological dysfunction. Distressed marriages are correlated with increased incidence of “specific illnesses such as cancer, cardiac disease and chronic pain” (Schmaling & Sher, 1997), (Fincham & Beech, 1999: 49). Conflict and divorce also have many psychological effects on couples. Research indicates that women suffer more psychological harm than men, possibly due to the increased burdens of singleness and childrearing.

The detrimental effects of conflict and divorce on children continue to be a subject of scrutiny. Guttman (1993) provided insight into the divorce experience of children compared to that of adults.

For adults, divorce can be viewed as a crisis that starts with marital disharmony and, over the course of time, approaches a potential resolution. For children, divorce represents a traumatic transition from life with both parents to the condition of living with only one, attended by the intermediate stages of personal imbalance, confusion, and disorganization (Guttman, 1993: 157-8).

Studies show that divorce comes as a shock to many children, even in households suffering from obvious marital distress (Guttman, 1993). Despite the admitted surprise of children at the decision to divorce, the dysfunction within pre-divorce homes has been correlated with increased stress and cardiac response to emotions and decreased self-control of emotional responses in children before any divorce has taken place (Gottman, 1994). The factors most predictive of a child’s response to divorce are the nature of family life before the divorce, the adjustment of

the parent retaining custody after the divorce, and the level of development the child has reached (Guttman, 1993).

Overall, marriage problems and divorce have been correlated with higher levels of childhood “depression, withdrawal, poor social competence, health problems, poor academic performance, and a variety of conduct-related difficulties” (Gottman, 1998: 170). Unfortunately, the research on individual outcomes is plagued by conflicting reports and confounding variables (Guttman, 1993). At the societal level, however, the negative impact of divorce on family economic status is clear. Nearly three-fourths of the \$200 billion spent annually on welfare is distributed to homes headed by single parents, and eighty percent of children living below the poverty line in the U.S. are the offspring of unmarried or divorced parents (Fagan, Patterson, & Rector, 2002). Some research has also indicated that children of divorce are more likely to divorce, themselves, though definitive evidence has yet to be presented (Gottman, 1998; Guttman, 1993; Teachman, 2002).

Divorce is thus a significant concern due to the detrimental effects it is proven to have on the psychological and physical health of many couples and their children. Unfortunately, the efficacy of interventions for currently married, distressed couples is questionable, both due to underlying societal influences on marriage and to methodological difficulties in evaluating the therapies, themselves.

Causes of divorce

Pankrust’s (1992) anthropologic research among the Amhara people in North Shewa province suggests that there are many factors involved in the dissolution of

marriage. The most common reasons women cited for dissolving a marriage were barrenness, husbands beating and ill treating them, wasting money adultery, exerting too much control over their activities, forcing intercourse, homesickness, and a large difference in age. The most common reasons men cited were barrenness, wives adultery, not keeping house correctly, and wives not obeying them or their authority

Causes and Correlates of Divorce: The View from Psychology

Three theoretical models are commonly used to explain the causes of divorce: enduring dynamics, disillusionment, and emergent-distress. The enduring dynamics model places the blame for failed marriages on characteristics of the couples relationships continuing from their initial stages of attraction and engagement (Huston, Neihuis, & Smith, 2001). The disillusionment and emergent-distress models suggest that newlyweds idealistic notions become more realistic over time, resulting in a decline in positivity (disillusionment) or an increase in negativity (emergent-distress) (Kurdeck, 2002: 4-5).

Huston et al. (2001) and Kurdeck (2002) assessed the appropriateness of these three models in explaining marital dissolution over time. Huston et al. found that disillusionment explains divorce, while enduring dynamics from the beginning of the relationship predict the early timing of divorce or the continuing level of "marital happiness" a couple may experience. Their study cited important differences in the patterns of change in early versus later-divorcing couples. The "early exiters" (divorced after two-six years) showed larger decreases in positive and larger increases in negative appraisals of marriage over the first two years than did couples who

remained married. "Delayed-action divorcers" also experienced decreases in positive aspects of marriage during their newlywed periods, but without the increases in negative aspects; hence, the decision to divorce came after a longer period of time. Although Huston et al. therefore advise that "researchers need to expand their theoretical vision beyond the emergent-distress model, with its focus on conflict and negativity" (2001, p. 118), the differences between early and later divorcers could be the result of simple differences in the speed of disillusionment or of a combination of disillusionment and emergent-distress: The decline in positivity could create vulnerability in the couple to increases in negative emotion and behavior

Stanley et al. also hypothesized that commitment levels would predict divorce. This hypothesis was proven true for both males and females; higher commitment levels in married participants were correlated with fewer thoughts of divorce or of marriage as a restrictive arrangement.

In addition to these communication patterns, certain sociological traits have also been correlated with divorce. Couples with lower divorce rates tend to hold more esteemed jobs and to have waited till their 20s to get married, rather than wed as teenagers (Donohue, 1991). Divorce is also negatively correlated with completed years of education (Stanley, 2001) and with religiosity (Whitehead & Popenoe, 2001). Extremely young couples, couples in which the husband is in and out of work, and African American couples, on the other hand, are more likely to divorce (Donohue, 1991).

Relationship between early marriage and divorce

Marriages in Amhara last on average about seven years and first marriages even less (about four years). Early marriages, the relatively better status of women in these communities and a host of other complex sets of factors have been evoked for this high rate of divorce and remarriage. (NCTPE, 2003: 130)

Tilson & Larson's analysis document shows that early marriage is an important and significant factor that influences the risk of divorce in Ethiopia. "Age at marriage is an important factor in the risk of divorce. Seventy-five percent of women who marry earlier than age 11 divorce within 20 years. Nearly 60 percent of women who marry between age 11 and 13 divorce within 20 years. The risk of divorce drops significantly for women who marry after age 14" (Tilson & Larson, 2000: 361).

There is high divorce rate in Amhara and the age gap between the spouses often means that girls are married to men who are older and more sexually experienced (FGAE, 2005; 6).

Women from Gojjam were 1.27 times more likely to divorce than women who lived in Addis Ababa, and women from all other regions were less likely to divorce than women from Addis Ababa (Tilson & Larson, 2000; p 368).

Kristin A. et al also tried to show the link between early marriage and divorce in the study called the consequences of age at first childbirth; marriage, separation and divorce; the urban institute by stating "couples who marry while still maturing may find themselves moving in different directions. They may lack the emotional and

social skills acquired by peers who allow themselves more time before assuming such an intense relationship as marriage (Kristin. A. et al, 1978: 7).

The same finding also states that “the current trend toward delayed marriage is a hopeful sign, one which may signal a declining in the frequency of divorce in the future” (Kristin. A. et al, 1978: 8)..

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings and Discussion

Background

Mecha Woreda is located in the West Gojjam Zone, Amhara Region. As indicated in the 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia the total population of West Gojjam Zone is 1,672,485 and out of this Mecha Woreda's population comprises 12,278 (7,019 Female & 5,259 Male) .

This report presents findings from the survey conducted among 88 girls aged between 7 and 18 in Mecha Woreda. Accordingly, 44 underage girls who are still married and 44 underage married girls who are currently divorced were involved in the survey. All the interviewed and FGD participated girls are Orthodox Christians. According to the Head Priest in Mecha Woreda, Orthodox Christianity is the main religion in the Woreda except that there are some Muslims in nearby towns.

The results cover different topics including marriage, divorce, education, reproductive health, social networks, the girls' life style, interventions and other related information on the lives of the girls in Mecha Woreda.

Marriage

Age at first marriage

Thirty six girls out of the interviewed 40 girls were married below the age of 14. Median age at first marriage for girls who are currently divorced is 12. Some of the girls were even pledged at birth.

All the respondents who got married under the age of 7 never lived with their husbands. According to the interviewed experts when children in Mecha Woreda under the age of ten are wedded the child bride stays with her in laws or her parents until she is mature enough to go and live with her husband. Nevertheless, the interviewed girls who are still married and got married above the age of 8 indicated that they have lived with their husbands between one to four years. And divorced girls lived for one to six years with their husband before being separated.

Twenty eight of the interviewees have married a husband who is much older than them - 10 to 15 years older than them. Average age difference with their husbands is 8 years.

'Since my husband was 14 years older than me he does not want to play with me but what I want to do was to go out to the field and play with my friends'.

Consent to marry

All the interviewed girls reported that they did not give their consent to marry. In addition they were not given a chance to decide on the timing of marriage and they did not know to whom they were getting married. It was the parents who decided and arranged their marriage. Thirty six of the interviewees were made to marry under the influence of their families without their consent. Only four of the interviewed girls particularly those who got married for the second time, had mutual interest and gave their consent to get married.

“I did not want to marry as I was attending class in a nearby elementary school. When my family was preparing a feast I asked them what they were celebrating and my mother told me it was a religious event. A day before my wedding day a lady came to do my hair and told me that I was getting married. I wanted to escape but since I did not have anywhere to go I got married and saw my husband for the first time on my wedding day. On my wedding day I cried the whole day.”

Most girls remember only the occasion. Families host weddings according to their economic status. One of the interviewed girls remembers her wedding as follows;

‘Two cows were slaughtered and ‘tella’ (local drink) was prepared for the wedding. I heard my neighbours saying that it is for a wedding but I thought that it was my elder sister who was getting married. It was only on the day of my wedding that I discovered it was mine. I refused to appear for the wedding but I was forced to’.

Another interviewee said

‘Even I did not realize that it was my wedding on the day of the wedding. I was compelled to sit next to my husband after I was made to wear a new dress. It was when I was forced to sleep with him that I realized I was married because I remembered what my married cousin told me. She told me that men and women sleep together when they are married only’.

Reasons for marriage

Parents' wish to conform to tradition was cited as a reason for getting married by 28 of the interviewed girls. According to the key informants and the interviewed girls, girls are expected to get married very young in order to make their parents proud and also to maintain the family's good name. Moreover girls should be virgin when they get married. There is also a fear that if a girl does not marry early she might become unmarriageable later in life.

Improving the economic status of the family was another main reason pointed out why the parents marry off their children at a very young age. Six of the interviewed girls explained that their parents did not have money to fulfill their wishes. Therefore they were made to marry in order for their husbands to take care of them. Three of the interviewed girls said marriage is believed to create bonds between parents of the bride and the in laws.

Only two of the respondents said they got married as they fell in love with their husbands. These girls are divorced and remarried. They explained that they were forced to marry first time; however it was their choice when they married for the second time.

Only one of the interviewed girls gave religion as a reason why her parents marry her off. On the contrary, when the Head Priest of Orthodox Churches in the Mecha Woreda was asked about what the Bible says about early marriage he said "a girl should not marry below the age of 18. Because when Eve was created she was about the age of 15. Adam abstained until she was 18 years old.'

Sexual activity and experiences of marriage

None of the interviewed girls were sexually active below the age of 7 due to the fact that they were still living with their parents though married. Though not all respondents who are married were sexually active immediately, 13 out of 20 interviewed still married girls become sexually active between the ages of 8 and 14. But, higher number of divorced girls are sexually active between the same age group. But 16 of the still married and also 14 of divorced interviewed girls between 15 and 18 years are sexually active. The median age at which all the respondents become sexually active is 13.

Seventeen of the still married girls had their first sexual intercourse before they started to menstruate and 18 of the divorced girls had the same experience. Thirty eight of the interviewed girls reported that they were not happy when they had sex at first. It is found out that the fact that the girls started to have sex at very young age makes the sexual act painful and non enjoyable. All interviewees who had sexual experience with their husband answered that their first sexual experience was full of pain.

'The first time I had sex with my husband I wanted to die. I remember he beat me severely and threatened me to have sex with him. The whole time it was so painful for me. I cried the whole night. On the next day I spent the night under a tree fearing that the same thing would happen to me again.'

A girl who escaped from her husband fearing the pain during sexual intercourse explained her first night with her husband as

'I did not know what he was going to do to me but I did not want to go to bed with him. When I refused my in-laws told me that I cannot say no and forced me to go with him. What he did to me was so painful that I was sick for a week. My in-laws said I will get used to it but whenever it becomes dark I get scared that he will come to do what he had done to me. Fearing the pain, I run out of his house and returned to my parents' place'.

During an FGD, when the girls were asked if they can say no to their husbands if they are not interested to have sex:

"We are forced to have sex every time our husbands want to have sex and if we refuse we are beaten and insulted. They do not understand that we refuse because it is so painful to us and not because we are not interested".

In addition to the physical abuse because of the sexual pain, all of the interviewed girls have reported that they have been abused by their husbands at least once in their life time. Abuse can take different forms; physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, or a combination of any or all of these. From the FGDs conducted also the researcher found out that the vast majority of the respondents go through one or more of the above-mentioned types of abuses.

Physical abuse is often the most easily spotted form of abuse. It may be any kind of hitting, shaking, burning, pinching, biting, choking, throwing, beating, and other

actions that cause physical injury, leave marks, or produce significant physical pain. The girls explained that there are different reasons why their husbands abuse them physically. Some of the common reasons forwarded were not cooking good food, not washing a husband's leg, not fetching water on time, not taking care of babies and the like.

"I was beaten day and night for not preparing tasty food. While I was living with my parents most of the cooking was done by my mother. When I married him he expected me to be a perfect cook like my mother but I could not do that as I have no experience".

The other interviewees also shared the same experience. A divorcee who is 14 years old said '*he used to beat me saying that I look old and unattractive*'.

The FGD conducted revealed that almost all of the interviewees have experienced at least one form of abuse.

"My husband expects me to wash his leg every night when he comes home. If I am taking care of my son and do not wash his leg as soon as he gets home, he will beat me."

Social network and responsibility

The burdensome responsibility and task they are expected to perform is also another problem that the girls face. They are given a lot of responsibility which are beyond their capacity.

Underage still married girls spend on average 16 to 17 hours carrying out household duties whereas currently divorced girls spend less hours working at

home – between 9 to 10 hours. The FGD conducted also showed that the interviewed girls do not have time neither for personal care nor to play with their peers as they are responsible to take care of all the household activities.

“Before my marriage I used to play with my peers and also help my families. But after I got married I am expected to do all the household activities which include washing, cleaning, preparing food and taking care of my husband. I sleep only for few hours. It was tough for me to do all those works. Had I been with my parents of course I would have worked but not this long.”

Twelve of the interviewed underage still married girls reported that they do not have close friends or relatives to share their secrets with. They explained that they spend their spare time with their in-laws and share some ‘secrets’ with their mothers, sisters, sisters-in-law and mothers-in-law to some extent. On the contrary, only 6 of the interviewed currently divorced girls do not have friends to share their secrets with which is comparatively better than the still married girls. Some of the reasons forwarded for this are the still married girls have more responsibility at home and most of the time they do not get permission from their husbands to meet with other people than their in laws and families. And also, though they can meet with their parents most of them live very far from their parents’ place which makes it very difficult to meet them often. Only 3 of the still married girls said they share their secrets with their husbands.

“My husband’s house is far away from my parent’s so I do not have any one I could talk to. So I always feel lonely and isolated. I even cry alone sometimes”.

Another interviewee added

“I used to see my husband as my father so I was not comfortable talking to him and discussing some issues with him”

The FGD conducted also confirmed that almost all of the interviewees were denied their right to play. Very few, particularly girls under the age of 11 and who are still living with their parents, said they still play with their friends.

Education

Only 5 of the underage still married girls in the youngest age group (between age 7 and 10) have been to school with the level of less than grade 4 and 9 of the divorced girls in the oldest age group (15 to 18) have been to school with the same level. The main reason forwarded is lack of access to formal education as the parents prefer to marry their girls off to send them to school. After marriage the girls are given responsibilities and would not have time to attend school. Seven of the interviewed underage still married girls and 10 of the divorced girls attend formal education.. The rationale given for the large number of divorced girls attending non-formal education than the still married girls is when the girls got divorced the responsibility they had diminishes and they get spare time to go to school. In addition, the interviewed girls explained that they dreamt of going to school while they were married.

Interviewed experts in Mecha Woreda described that United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in partnership with Ministry of Youth and Sports and Population Council started giving non-formal education. Most girls joined the programme. An expert indicated that more divorced girls participate in the programme than married girls as they have less responsibility than married girls.

Income

All of the still married interviewed girls are economically dependent on their husbands as they have no income of their own and 18 of the interviewed divorced girls are economically dependent on their families. Only two of the divorced girls earn an income of their own by selling local drinks.

'I have no income of my own. Even when I want to buy underwear it is my husband that buys it for me which really embarrasses me. Therefore I always try not to ask him for anything. And I always wish to have my own income to buy what I want to have.'

Reproductive health

All the respondents gave birth at home. All deliveries were attended either by their own mother, aunts, in-laws or neighbours. Hardly any of the respondents were attended by a medical professional. No respondent also received care before, during and after pregnancy. Thirty six of the respondents said their labour took more than one day. Nevertheless, most of them said they had no complications during delivery though they gave birth at home. All interviewees reported that they have one to two children.

“After having a painful sexual intercourse with him I got pregnant and when I gave birth I was about to die from the labour. It was after two days of labour that I gave birth. Since we do not have clinics around Mecha Woreda I could not get medical help. I was sure that I was dying. I asked my mother to take me to Merawi town (nearby town) where there is a clinic but she told me if she takes me there the doctors would cut me (c- section). I blamed my families for making me go through all that complication. Had they not made me marry very young I would not have suffered that much.”

Seventeen of both the interviewed still married and divorced girls know about injectables (depo) as a family planning method whereas less than 10 of the respondents in both groups know about condom as contraceptive. Rather condom in the Woreda is well-known as a protection method from HIV/AIDS only. When asked if they use contraceptives 9 of the still married girls and 5 of the divorced girls reported that they use injectables whereas only 3 of girls in both groups said they use condoms as family planning method. However when they were asked if they use condom for protecting themselves from HIV/AIDS the number increased significantly. The number of divorced girls that use contraceptives is less than the still married ones. This is due to the fact that most of the divorced girls are not sexually active but those that are active reported that they use both injectables and condoms.

Most still married girls described that since they do not want to have many children they take injectables. The majority prefer injectables than other family planning

methods because they said they can take the injection without their husbands know about it. They explained that they usually take the injections when they go to markets. Some also said they take the injection with their husbands' permission.

Thirty four of the respondents are aware of family planning methods. However, only 16 of such respondents use such methods. Some of the facts that are believed to have contributed to the low use of family planning method in the area – as forwarded by the interviewed experts and girls – are though most of the girls know where to get a family planning method they are afraid of their husbands finding out about it. Moreover some respondents said the number of children a woman should have is up to God. Some also added they want to have as many children as they can because children are wealth.

All respondents were highly knowledgeable on basic information related to HIV/AIDS. And also all respondents know about fistula though all think that the only cause for fistula is early marriage. When all respondents were asked about the consequence of early marriage all of them related it with fistula.

Divorce and remarriage

Among the respondents who married before the age of 10 more than half of them were married more than once. For most of these girls their first marriage and divorce was decided by their parents. In comparison, only two of them who married after 15 were married more than once. Eighteen of the interviewed girls said they were the ones who wanted to divorce because they were not happy with their relationship. In giving reasons for their unhappiness leading to divorce the majority of divorced respondents gave education as a reason for their divorce. They explained that they left their husbands in

search of education. The vast majority of these girls either were forced to quit going to school to get married or dreamt of going to school. The parents who wished to conform to their tradition did not leave room for the girls' personal growth.

“All I needed was to go to school, study to become a doctor and help patients in Mecha Woreda. But now, look at me I am a mother with no education. Nobody listened to my need. This had always disappointed me so one day I decided that this has to stop somewhere and I left my husband.”

Nevertheless, most of the respondents gave abuse as a reason for divorce.

“Whenever he wanted to have sex, especially if he was drunk, he used to beat me. There was a fight everyday between me and him about this issue. I hated the pain so I left my husband.”

The other most frequently cited reason for causing divorce was parents' decision. This was very common for those girls that got married under the age 7. According to the information collected from the experts mainly in the last two years due to some interventions by governmental and non-governmental organizations the level of awareness of the parents about the use of education and negative consequence of early marriage has increased. After realizing the shortcomings of early marriage parents terminate the marriage of their daughters themselves. According to the respondents this number is very high among those girls that were married/ were pledged to get married and never lived with their husbands. For those that moved in with their husbands already, taking them back is a problem, said an expert.

Only 3 of the divorced girls cited economic status as a reason for divorce and 2 percent gave barrenness as a cause.

“My husband used to beat me accusing me of taking contraceptives while I still did not see menstruation. I was only 13. I always swear and told him the truth but he did not believe me. So he divorced me. He wanted to have children immediately after we got married.”

Merely two of the respondents said their husbands left them for another woman or for a better job in another town.

All the divorced respondents described that after divorce the responsibility of raising children is solely left to them as a mother. Since the girls do not have their own income they are forced to seek financial assistance from their families.

In addition, more than half of the interviewed remarried girls explained that they remarried for economical reasons and also for fear of social stigma.

Fourteen of the divorced interviewees said they do not want to get married in the future.

“I do not think of getting married again. I do not want to go through the pain again. Now that I am divorced I feel so happy. Why should I make mistakes again in the future? If I get married in the future I am going to divorce so I do not want that to happen again.”

Nonetheless, 6 of the divorced girls claimed that they want to get married again in the future. The reasons they want to remarry differ though. Some want to get married for

fear of social stigma, some for economic reasons and others want to marry a man that they choose.

“Yes!!! I want to get married when I grow up and get educated. Then, I will be mature enough to cope up with married life. But still I want to marry a guy that I choose.”

Another respondent said

“Now that I am divorced I fear the social stigma of being seen as single mother which is disgraced by the society. Also my parents are not well-off to raise my son. The only choice I have is to marry again whether I like it or not.”

The stigma affects not only the girls but also their families as they are going to be insulted for what their children have done.

The experts also said the number of divorcees has increased in the last 2 years as the number of girls that are going to school has increased in Mecha Woreda. Since community awareness about the negative consequences and the use of education has increased, parents have started making their children divorced especially those under the age of 11 and sending them to school. Another reason given was competition with their neighbours and friends who send their children to school.

When the experts asked how the parents' awareness increased, they explained that the number of organizations working in the Woreda on the prevention of early marriage has increased. In addition the government is campaigning on access to education in the process of implementing the MDGs.

Attitude towards age at first marriage, marriage and divorce

Fifteen of the divorced girls have negative attitude about marriage and 3 of still married girls shared the same attitude. On the other hand, 11 of the interviewed still married girls do not comment whether they have positive or negative attitude about marriage and this attitude is also shared by 3 of the divorced respondents. Only 6 of still married girls and 2 divorced girls have a positive attitude about marriage.

Although vast majority of the respondents have negative attitude about marriage they are still married. The reasons given by the interviewees for staying still married is related to a number of factors. Four of the interviewees answered that they are still married because they are happy with their marriage.

'My husband is a very good person. He buys me cloths every new year and he does not beat me so I love my marriage'.

Another interviewee who is happy with her marriage also added by saying

'My life is so good. He loves me and we are living happily'.

However, 11 of the interviewees are still married because of traditional factors.

'I am not happy with my marriage. My husband beats me day and night and he is not good for me. On top of that he wants to take my family's farm. But I cannot divorce him since I do not expect something different other than being what he wants me to be. In our culture divorced women are unwanted and their families are ashamed of them. I do not want my family to feel bad about me so I will stay with him. I have seen others who

are divorced. Even I myself blame them for divorcing their husband as they should have been tolerant.'

The other interviewee also strengthened her argument by saying

'So many women including me are not happy with their marriages but a woman has to do what her husband wants her to be to get accepted by the society. In our society, once a girl is married she should not divorce her husband because their children will be raised with out a father. And a child with no father is insulted as 'yeset lij' (a woman's child). The child will not also be properly raised. So I live with my husband even if I am not happy with my life.'

Three of the interviewees are living with their husbands for financial reasons. *'My families are very poor. They cannot feed me but my husband can. So, though I am not happy with my marriage I am living with him.'*

Only 2 of the interviewed still married girls reported that they are still married in fear of God.

'Divorce is a sin. Even in the Bible Eve is made for Adam so whatever is happening I have to fulfil his needs and be with him to be a true Christian. It was before a priest that I got married how can I say no to the same priest that joined me and my husband. It is something that God wouldn't like'

Eighteen of the still married girls that claimed to be unhappy in their marriages said they tried to escape. However, they were forced by their close relatives and families to go back and stay married.

'I run out of his house and went to my family but I was forced to go back. After some months I left my husband and went to my family but again I was forced to return and live with my husband. Nobody shares my feelings. All they say is that I have to live with him no matter what happens to me.'

The FGD also showed that divorce is something the girls fear especially for the sake of their families and children. However, the majority of divorced girls said they are happy that they are divorced.

'I am so happy that I separated with my husband. Now I go to school and learn like my friends. I also live with my parents so I am very happy that that I am divorced.'

The other interviewee added

'I play with my friends and I do not have too much household responsibility as I used to have. So I am happy now.'

Only 2 the divorced girls do not agree that there is happiness after divorce.

'I left my husband because he used to beat me heavily. I thought the abuse would stop as I divorced my husband but now my neighbours see me as arrogant and unstable person. So I am not fully happy. Everyday my parents tell me how wrong my decision was. They tell me that I

should have tolerated every thing and lived with my husband. They blame me saying that I have brought disgrace to the family. I feel so sad that I have spoiled their good name. Sometimes I regret that I divorced him.'

Seventeen of the still married girls viewed the best marriage age for a girl is above 18. Most of them refer this age as an age that one finishes school and become independent. The majority felt that the age they were married was not an ideal age to get married.

'I was only 7 years old. Even before I finished playing with my peers I got married. I did not go to school. I was not even sure what marriage was. Had I been above 18 I would have finished school and prepared for marriage.'

Another interviewee also added

'The reason why I have become a mother at the age of 14 is because I was married early. I love my child but sometimes when I see my friends playing and me taking care of my baby, I feel unhappy.'

The FGD conducted also showed that the girls are unhappy because at young age they are expected to perform and take responsibilities which are beyond their capacities. On the contrary, only 4 of the interviewees said it was the right age to get married for a reason that they have become able to support their families.

'I was married at the age of 8. My families were given dowry which helped them financially. I still believe that my parents survived because of my marriage. So I think I got married at the right age.'

When the respondents were asked if there is a relationship between early marriage and divorce, only 3 of still married girls responded no. Conversely, 19 of the divorced girls replied yes.

Vision

Respondents were asked about their future plans. What those interviewees who have children want to see in the future is limited to raising their children and performing household activities.

'Of course it is obvious!!! In the future I want to help my family at home. I also want to raise my children and want them to go to school'.

This is also supported by the results got from the FGD. The mothers believe that all they can do is becoming good mothers and taking care of their children. But those that do not have children have a different vision. The most commonly cited vision by the respondents was going to school.

Sixteen of the underage still married girls and 18 of the divorced girls claim that they know about the right age to get married under the existing law. However only 2 of these girls know about the punishment attached with early marriage under the existing law.

'I know that a girl has to be 18 years old to get married. I also heard that if she gets married before 18 there is some kind of punishment. But I do not know what it is.'

According to an interview conducted with the President of the Amhara Region Supreme Court, the law has also legal lacuna. In order for interested parties like parents to oppose marriage only 15 days is given before the marriage is concluded. So no one can oppose if such time is lapsed. This works for those that conduct their marriage at the municipality. Additionally he indicated that though some legal awareness programme is being given to the society it is not strengthened for lack of finance and man power. He also commented that the law is not implemented well as some of the legal enforcers also share this same belief with the other society. Even some of the prosecutors who take the case to the attention of the court attend the wedding.

It was also explained that some of members of the society that are aware of the punishable nature of the practice marry their daughters off under cover claiming that they are commemorating religious events. Practically for lack of birth registration in the Woreda it has become difficult to implement the law as it is not possible to know the age of spouses.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

From the study that the researcher conducted the following conclusions have been reached.

The girls in Mecha Woreda marry at very young age. Some of them are even pledged at birth. The median age at first marriage for the girls is 8. Average age difference with their husbands is 11.

The main reason why the parents marry off their children at very young age is parents desire to conform to tradition. The families' good name, marrying their daughters when they are virgin, creating bonds, fear that the girls would reach unmarriageable age and competition with others are among the grounds attached with the tradition. Economic reasons such as receiving dowry and fulfilling their daughters' financial needs is another factor which interests most of the parents to marry off their daughters.

The other explanation given for girls to get married young was to go in line with religion. Conversely, the religious leaders indicated that the main reason for early marriage has no relationship with religion whereas it is the culture that is contributing for the harmful traditional practice. Therefore, religion is wrongly misunderstood to be the cause for early marriage.

The parents also force their children to get married early seeking additional labour. These days, the number of young people that migrate to cities in search of education and better job opportunities have increased. As a result, families do not have

enough help to farm and perform household activities. Consequently, they get their daughter married in order to get the husband's assistance. Thus as the girl's are married the husband's assist the girl's parents by farming.

Generally factors as lack of awareness by the society, poverty, cultural beliefs and practices such as females should get married at early age not to be unwanted and spoiled is what is contributing to early marriage.

High divorce rate is also observed in Mecha Woreda as the girls are not matured to get married. This is supported by various factors. The followings are among the major ones.

The girls are not consented neither when nor to whom they are getting married at their first marriage. The marriages were arranged by their parents. Therefore the girls find it very difficult to live with a stranger and new environment when they are not ready. This has not been the case for the very few girls who were consented when married for the second time.

Girls in the Woreda are abused sexually, physically and emotionally. The girls had gone through at least one type of abuse. As the girls marry very young they lack the skill and experience of handling household duties properly. Hence, they get beaten when they fail to cook tasty food, finish work on time, wash their husbands' cloths and legs, take care of the children, clean the house and the like. Thus the household duties they are expected to perform become unbearable. Additionally, sine they spend most of their time by performing household activities they do not have leisure time neither for personal care

nor to play with their peers. They sleep very few hours and work on average 16 to 17 hours a day which is very frustrating to them.

Sexual experience is painful to all the girls as they are not physically matured. This can be described by the fact that they start to have sexual intercourse very young and in most instances before seeing menstruation. Median age at first sex is 12. The girls have sexual intercourse just to satisfy their husbands' sexual interest. Even if when they have no interest to have sex they are forced and beaten to sleep with their husbands.

Some girls that escaped marriage are abused and not welcomed by their families and relatives which in turn force them to migrate to nearby cities. Most of the migrated girls become commercial sex workers which risked their lives to HIV/AIDS and other problems.

When people are abused it can affect every aspect of their lives, especially self-esteem. They may not do well in life because they are angry, frightened or do not care. Many people who are abused distrust others. They may also feel a lot of anger towards others and it detaches them from any kind of relationship.

In addition the fact that the society expects girls to be isolated and carry on all household duties the effects of abuse add up and contribute to the limited social networks that the girls have. The girls have very limited social networks and support. Very few of them interact with their mothers and in-laws on particular topics like household duties. They have no one to discuss some personal issues. Distance is another barrier contributing to the limited social network the girls have as the parents' house is located

far from their house. Thus, they feel lonely and isolated as a result they go to their parents in search of their parent's affection.

The girls get married at very young age when they were supposed to go to school. Seeing their peers going to school and knowing that they do not have the same opportunity like their friends makes them unhappy with their life and develop hatred towards their relationship. In the Woreda, girls go to school not only to get knowledge but also as a mechanism to escape marriage.

The partners also do not have common interest and way of understanding issues as they have large difference in age. The girls also do not have a means to earn income and are economically dependent on their husband during marriage and on their parents after divorced. Thus, the interest of the girls is not taken in to consideration which creates unhappiness for them.

When girls give birth at very young age the labour is long and painful. Most girls do not want to give birth again after experiencing complicated delivery. This makes them hate the relationship and escape from it. Lack of awareness and very low use of family planning methods result on increasing the family size. Consequently this adds up on the responsibility of the girls and also creates financial problems. This is therefore another factor that makes the girls unhappy on their marriage.

Therefore for the above mentioned reasons divorce is indirectly caused by early marriage. In other words, factors that are attached to early marriage cause unhappiness to

the girls which in turn lead to divorce. Divorce for the majority of the girls is a relief as it relieves them from all the burdens and unhappiness.

After divorce the girls face several problems which social stigma and lack of financial support are among the major ones. The social stigma related to divorce for most of the girls is intolerable. Furthermore raising the children exclusively falls upon the shoulder of the mother. For these reasons most of the girls remarry. Remarriage is very common in Mecha Woreda.

Some intervention programs on fighting early marriage are being carried out both by governmental and non governmental organizations in the Woreda. Other studies on the effectiveness of the interventions show that some positive changes have been observed on the level of awareness on early marriage of the community in the last two years. Consequently, as the community awareness increase the parents have started realizing the shortcomings of early marriage and terminating their children's marriage which is contributing to the high rate of divorce.

Despite the fact that the existing law makes early marriage a punishable act it is not enforced and implemented well. Additionally the community is not aware of the existing laws as awareness raising programmes are not well carried. Hence legal lacuna is observed by the researcher.

CHAPTER SIX

Recommendation

In view of the fact that education is associated with positive outcomes in terms of health, wellbeing of the girls and delaying early marriage the researcher recommends that the girls should be provided with increased access to schooling. Non formal education should be strengthened since it helps the girls to get information about Reproductive Health such as Family Planning, HIV/AIDS, sanitary and personal care. Role models from the Woreda like girls that completed higher education should be honoured to encourage the other girls to go to school.

The clubs that are established in each Woreda district to educate the society about early marriage and the negative consequences should be strengthened to increase the awareness level of the community on early marriage. More budget should be allocated and man power should be assigned for the same purpose. Education should be given to influential groups of the society like community elders, religious leaders and law enforcement bodies. Though divorce is seen as a relief to the girls the negative consequences of divorce should also be taught.

Besides other methods of teaching the community about early marriage, the researcher recommends the use of radio for teaching purpose as most of the members of the community listen to radio regularly.

Birth registration system should be designed and implemented as the parents are taking advantage of the absence of the system to twist their daughters' age and evade from the law.

Interventions such as those initiated by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Ministry of Youth and Sports and Population Council should be scaled up as it is bringing positive change in terms of increasing awareness of the community on early marriage, reproductive health and access to education. The government strategy to implement the MDGs and to give education for all should also be scaled up.

In general, given that early marriage affects the life of the girls negatively and is associated with high rates of divorce a lot has to be done to fight the practice. Furthermore, in view of the fact that early marriage has a relationship with divorce the researcher strongly recommends for those that initiate interventions to fight early marriage to also include divorce as one component of the intervention.

Finally it is recommended that other researches should be conducted on areas of legal barriers in implementing the existing law, reproductive health and effective interventions as there is a gap that needs to be filled.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Researcher's challenges and experience

The first challenge encountered by the researcher was the location of the Woreda as the researcher had to walk for hours to reach the respondents. When it rains the situation got even worse.

Some methodologies used were found to be different from what most research books pointed out. For instance, the FGD and interview took more time than it was estimated in most research books. The researcher had to probe the girls to speak about their experience as they lack confidence and are shy to speak freely. They also feared to expose their personal life in particular questions about abuse and sexual life took longer time. The researcher used different techniques to probe the girls open up like attentive listening and summarisation. And also the fact that the researcher is a woman was an advantage. Because it helped the girls to believe that she has passed through the same experience and understand than better. Additionally, the locations selected for interviewing the girls provided comfort and privacy. The researcher also tried to show empathy as much as possible.

The researcher also noticed that the educated girls articulated their problems and experiences openly than the uneducated ones comparatively.

Though the language used in the area is Amharic some words the girls used were not clear for the researcher. Therefore, the researcher had to get a local assistant to facilitate the discussion.

From the researcher experience interview is the most effective data collection tool in Mecha Woreda than FGD. In most instances FGD is chosen to probe respondents to tell the reality since they are homogeneous groups more idea is expected to be raised and at last collective solution to be obtained .But this was not the case in Mecha Woreda. For a reason like the girls are shy to express their feelings in front of others and there was a tendency of repeating what others say than expressing their own feelings. The researcher also realized that questionnaire would not be effective as interview in this Woreda as most of the members of the community are illiterates and the kind of Amharic they use is different from what is commonly used.

Explaining the consent form and asking for their willingness to answer the questions created more confusion since consent form is a new idea for them.

The researcher noticed that the age most girls claim they are and their physical look does not match as most girls do not know their age exactly. And also since there is no vital birth registration most of the girls were told their age by their parents.

The absence of theories on the relationship between early marriage and divorce especially in the Ethiopian context was another challenge faced by the researcher.

For the reason that Orthodox Christianity is the main religion in Mecha Woreda all the respondents were orthodox Christians. Thus the experience of other religion types was not studied.

Annex-I

Guiding questions to early married girls who are still living with their husband

Introduction letter of consent

First I want to thank you for taking your time to talk to me. My name is Rediet Mesfin. I am a graduating student of Addis Ababa University in the department of social work and currently I am working on my research thesis. I would like to ask you questions about yourself and your marriage. I am interested in finding out what young girls like you in Amhara region specifically Mecha woreda feel about marriage in early ages. The purpose of asking these questions is to learn more about early married girls in this area.

Your experiences are important to my study. It would be to the interest of me if you could answer my questions in an honest and truthful manner. Any information that you provide will be considered private and confidential and will be used only for this research. Your name will not appear anywhere on this questionnaire or in the report from this research or in any other information that may identify you.

Before I came here to discuss this with you I have done a pre test and interviewed other early married girls. I have learnt from them that there are different experiences that young married girls like you pass through. The work I am engaged in also has taught me a lot about what young married girls face. Above all that I am an Ethiopian and I know about our culture but I believe that you will help me to learn more. So nothing you will say will shock me. In fact, I have heard a lot about most of what we are going to discuss. You are encouraged to answer as many questions as possible. Your participation is voluntary and, if you are too uncomfortable with a particular question, you may choose not to answer it.

All the questions will take about an hour. But if you have any question concerning this you may ask first.

If you don't have any question and agree with the terms that you will stay with me for an hour and respond to the questions, please sign or use your thumb mark to show that you are willing to do so.

I Ms/Miss..... have agreed to participate in the interview that Ms.Rediet Mesfin is going to conduct which is going to be about my personal experience and perception of marriage at early ages.

Signature..... Date.....

Guiding questions

How old are you?

How old were you when you first got married? What about your spouse?

How did u get married?

Have you ever attended school? What about vocational or apprentice training?

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Are you currently going to school? If not why not ?

Do you plan to go back to school? If not why not?

Can you read and write?

What do you do in your leisure time?

How many close friends do you have, meaning people with whom you share your most personal secrets or concerns?

Did you know your husband before you got married?

What do you like most and least about marriage?

Are you happy with your marriage? why? why not?

Is this your first marriage?

How long have you been with your husband?

What is your future plan?

How do you describe your marriage?

What is your perception about divorce?

Do you think that young girls should get married? If not why not?

What do you think is the right age to get married? What is your reason for saying that?

Thinking about when you got married, was it too early, too late, or about right?

What was the biggest change in your life when you got married?

How did you react to these new change?

Have you given birth?

Have you ever left your spouse because of a disagreement or dispute?Where did you go/

What did you do?

Do you think early marriage has any relation ship with divorce?

Based on your life experience what do you suggest needs to be done in instances whereby young girls are made to get married?

Thank you so much for giving me your time, for being honest and open to me. If you don't have any question I am done with mine.

Thank you

Annex-II

Guiding questions to early married girls who are currently divorced

Introduction letter of consent

First I want to thank you for taking your time to talk to me. My name is Rediet Mesfin. I am a graduating student of Addis Ababa University in the department of social work and currently I am working on my research thesis. I would like to ask you questions about yourself and your marriage. I am interested in finding out what young girls like you in Amhara region specifically Mecha woreda feel about marriage in early ages. The purpose of asking these questions is to learn more about early married girls in this area.

Your experiences are important to my study. It would be to the interest of me if you could answer my questions in an honest and truthful manner. Any information that you provide will be considered private and confidential and will be used only for this research. Your name will not appear anywhere on this questionnaire or in the report from this research or in any other information that may identify you.

Before I came here to discuss this with you I have done a pre test and interviewed other early married girls. I have learnt from them that there are different experiences that young married girls like you pass through. The work I am engaged in also has taught me a lot about what young married girls face. Above all that I am an Ethiopian and I know about our culture but I believe that you will help me to learn more. So nothing you will say will shock me. In fact, I have heard a lot about most of what we are going to discuss. You are encouraged to answer as many questions as possible. Your participation is voluntary and, if you are too uncomfortable with a particular question, you may choose not to answer it.

All the questions will take about an hour. But if you have any question concerning this you may ask first.

If you don't have any question and agree with the terms that you will stay with me for an hour and respond to the questions, please sign or use your thumb mark to show that you are willing to do so.

I Ms/Miss..... have agreed to participate in the interview that Ms.Rediet Mesfin is going to conduct which is going to be about my personal experience and perception of marriage at early ages.

Signature..... Date.....

Guiding questions to early married girls who are divorced

How old are you?

How old were you when you first got married? What about your spouse?

How did u get married?

Have you ever attended school? What about vocational or apprentice training?

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Are you currently going to school? If not why not ?

Do you plan to go back to school? If not why not?

Can you read and write?

What do you do in your leisure time? before and after you got divorced?

How many close friends do you have, meaning people with whom you share your most personal secrets or concerns?

Did you know your husband before you got married?

What did you like most and least about marriage?

Were you happy with your marriage? why? why not?

Was it your first marriage?

How long did you stay with your husband?

What is your future plan?

How do you describe your former marriage?

Do you think that young girls should get married? If not why not?

What do you think is the right age to get married? What is your reason for saying that?

Thinking about when you got married, was it too early, too late, or about right?

What was the biggest change in your life when you got married?

How did you react to these new change?

Have you given birth?

Have you ever left your spouse because of a disagreement or dispute before Where did you go/ What did you do?

What is your perception about divorce?

How did you divorce with your husband?

Who decided that you should be separated?

How are you feeling after the divorce?

Do you plan to get married in the future?

Is there any problem attached with you being divorced?

How was the response of your families? friends? relatives ?and people around you?

Do you think early marriage has any relationship with divorce?

Do you think your divorce is related with the fact that you got married at early age?

Based on your life experience what do you suggest needs to be done in instances whereby young girls are made to get married?

Thank you so much for giving me your time, for being honest and open to me. If you don't have any question I am done with mine.

Thank you

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and all the sources of information used for the study have been duly acknowledged.

Name: Rediet Mesfin

Signature: _____

Date: July 30, 2008

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as a university advisor.

Name: Dr. Sandhya Joshie

Signature: Sandhya Joshie

Date: July 30, 2008