

**Full Length Research**

# **Lived Experiences of Divorced Women in Rural Ethiopia. A Special Focus in Hulet Ejju Enessie Woreda: Addis Zemen Kebele**

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Based on life-story interviews with women, this paper analyzes post -divorce experiences of rural divorced women. The study attempted to investigate the economic and social impacts of divorce on divorced women. In addition, the study investigated the impacts of parental divorce on the psychological well-being of divorced women; specifically, how they manage to adapt to their new lives after legal dissolution were examined. Data collection primarily relies on in-depth interviews supplemented with document analysis and observation of case proceeds in Hulet Ejju Enessie Woreda family court. Unstructured questionnaires were developed incorporating open- ended questions. The data were gathered from purposively selected interviewees specifically, used snowball sampling technique. The study employed phenomenological research design which includes solely qualitative approach. Thematic qualitative analysis technique has been employed to analyze the data. The study concluded that divorce caused various difficulties including financial, social and psychological problems for the participants. In addition, the participants developed a wide range of survival strategies in the face of difficulties and challenges they experienced which attested to their agency during and after the divorce process.

**Key words:** Women; Divorce; Phenomenology

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Marriage and divorce are social issues as well as private concerns. The success and failure of our marriage have consequences beyond our personal lives. Individuals at the crossroads of divorce help not only just themselves and their families but also their neighborhoods, communities, and nation when they are able to repair their relationships and establish a healthy, stable marriage (Tizita, 2013).

Divorce has become a serious problem; challenging the establishment of the family in a routine manner and

causing severe impacts on the emotional and mental health of the individual especially, women. Since women are considered as the binding force in the family, they are believed to be responsible for whatever wrong is done. It has been argued that women invest more in the family, take a larger responsibility for marriage, and therefore perceive divorce as a greater failure than men do (Kurdek, 1990 Hung, Kung & Chan, 2004, cited in Sharma, 2011).

The expectation of divorced women about social and

economic problems before termination of marriage is larger than what was before marriage. The reason given by divorced women for expecting social problems after divorce is due to having a poor relationship with the neighbor and having no money to establish relationships. Those who expected economic problems knew it was due to lack of job and having no money at hand. The life of divorced women are negatively affected not only due to lack of social relationship but also as a result of their position in the relation. Therefore, one of the causes of distress and frustration during divorce for many divorced women is the limited opportunity to cope with economic problems (Serkalem, 2006).

All over the world, the divorce rate among couples is increasing at an alarming rate and the family structure is disintegrating worldwide and spreading like an epidemic which affected the structure of all countries. This has forced people to think that it is becoming a global trend. Many studies have discussed this social phenomenon. However, most of these studies focused on its causes (Khurshid & Khatoon, 2012).

In the case of Ethiopia, the arguments about the increasing number of divorces are both internal to the family and external. The reasons peculiar to the situation of the country are ethnic politics, job displacement, economic crises and changing attitudes towards divorce. The agreement of spouses and /or a petition for divorce is the outcome of a malfunction of family for many personal, social and economic reasons (Daniel, 1994).

According to Tilson and Larson (2000), 45% of first marriages in Ethiopia end in divorce within 30 years, 28% within the first 5 years, 34% within 10 years, and 40% within 20 years. In addition, the study indicated that divorce is more common among Amhara group than Oromo group and orthodox Christian than Muslim groups. Even though both groups of religion discourage divorce, together with other cultural factors, the variation of divorce rate between the groups is explained in relation to the extent of roles both religions play in the lives of the believers.

Based on life-story interviews with divorced women, this study investigated the causes, lived experiences including the economic, social, and psychological challenges and coping strategies of divorced women.

## STATEMENTS OF THE PROBLEM

The phenomenon of the single-parent family has generated considerable social concern and interest within the research community. Rising divorce rates, large and ever-increasing numbers of children being raised in single-parent homes, and the increasing prevalence of female-headed households renders the single-parent family in general, and the experiences of divorced women in particular, a legitimate area for research (Snyman, 1987

cited in Naidoo, 1998).

Divorce results different consequences on the economic well being of men and women. A study by Bogale (2003) revealed that women experience an income decline of about 30% while male experienced about a 10% drop in income. Three years after the failure of their marriages, divorced women experience greater adversity than their married peers. During the first year after divorce, custodial mothers were more anxious, depressed, angry, and self-doubting than were married mothers. They also showed comparatively less affection to their children, communicated less with them, punished them more, and were more inconsistent in their use of discipline.

In a similar way, Kotwal and Prabhakar (2009) found that divorced mothers experienced greater number of stressful events such as demotions, layoffs, accidents, critical illnesses and problems with their own parents than did married women. Divorced mothers are also trapped in a vicious cycle of financial problems and other stressful life events. The results revealed that women tend to suffer from a feeling of rootlessness and lack of identity after divorce. This is especially true of women whose identity was formerly associated with that of their husbands.

Studies reveal that most divorced women in Ethiopia are house wives and these divorced women gain custody of children without child support (Semhal, 2007). Serkalem (2006) also studied the causes and the socio-economic impacts of divorce on women and their children and concluded that divorced women in Ethiopia are economically weak and usually engage in informal sectors like selling home made products (Tella, Arekie, Injera, etc), collecting wood and retailing activities after divorce. This makes their lives miserable. These single mothers are usually stressed. Serkalem's finding also revealed that the social relationship of divorced women does not enable them to get the moral and economical support they need.

Though Serkalem (2006) investigated the socio-economic impacts of divorce on women and their children, in the Ethiopian context, her study dealt the situation only in Addis Ababa. She also did not see the possible strategies that divorced women use to cope with divorce. Therefore, the present study departs from the earlier studies in important ways. It helps to fill the gap of what coping strategies women adopt to overcome the challenges they faced after divorce.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study is to examine the causes and lived experiences of divorced women in Hulet Ejju Enessie Woreda. In line with this, the specific objectives of the study are intended:

- To investigate the causes of divorce.
- To investigate the challenges that women are facing after their marriage are dissolved.
- To identify strategies that women are using to cope and tackle the challenges they faced after divorce.

### Research questions

To attain the above stated objectives, the study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- ❖ What are the causes for the dissolution of marriage?
- ❖ What challenges do women experiences after their marriage is terminated?
- ❖ What strategies women use to cope with the challenges after divorce?

### METHODS AND MATERIALS

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher used qualitative research method. Among strategies of qualitative research method, phenomenological strategy was employed for this study since its focus is how people experience a particular phenomenon. The study employed primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected through unstructured in-depth interview. The researcher also used secondary data information such as, different studies, documents, reports, publications, discussion papers, conducted by individual researchers, Journals, books, International and regional conventions, treatise and documents, electronic resources from internet were amply reviewed. With regard to sampling technique, the researcher employed non-probability sampling technique as the research process is one of 'discovery' rather than the testing of hypotheses. At the initial phase, potential participants were sought by convenience sampling technique and then those participants were asked to identify others who were eligible to participate. In other words, the researcher used snowball sampling as it had the ability to grow a network of participants by taking advantage of the relationship with the current participants. This second generation of participants is then contacted and, in turn, identified other participants. To this end, the actual number of participants in qualitative inquiry is flexible; depending on what is generally termed as data saturation. The initial intent of the researcher was to interview between 6-8 participants. However, data saturation was not achieved until participant 10. In order to ensure data saturation had been achieved, three additional participants were interviewed. The content of those interview confirmed that redundancy had been achieved.

### Thematic analysis

To analyze the data, thematic approach as an inductive way of data analysis was utilized. The data analysis process began with a researcher's interest in substantive general areas; the researcher gave way to relevant themes to come out from the data. The analysis of the data progressed through a number of different stages. First, the researcher tried to internalize interviewee's audio record repeatedly to make familiar with the issue. Secondly, the researcher transcribed the audio record to Amharic language. Thirdly, the researcher translated it in to English. From this initial process, a set of key categories and sub-categories were identified. A coding framework was established and all transcribed interviews, were coded. Through the help of memo writing, the researcher identified crucial themes from data and coded them under variety of categories. Major themes from interviews were chosen as categories to be analyzed. In addition to common themes, unique ideas raised from single interviewees were also taken into consideration for their distinctive contribution. To ensure confidentiality, their names have been changed in to letters.

Broadly speaking, the researcher used the following five stages involved in the analysis of the data. In logical order these were: Preparation of the data, familiarity with the data, interpreting the data (developing codes, categories and concepts), verifying the data and representing the data.

### RESULTS

This section devoted to present the data obtained from 10 divorced women through interview.

#### Causes of Divorce

According to the participants, there were different reasons for the initiation of divorce on their marriage. Among the causes; husband addiction to alcohol and infidelity contributed the larger share. In addition, fertility problem of women, pressure from friends and families, economic and health problems were reported. The story taken from the following two women illustrates this point very well. Participant "A" who is a victim of such problem said that she has seen no other reason for ending her marriage except her health problem. She said;

*After I gave birth to my sixth child, I became very sick and my husband told me that he does not want to live with me and force me to go out from the house. He gave our communal property to his mistrust though I reported the case to both religious leaders and Kebele administrators. My relatives also asked him to share the property*

*with me. Yet, the case is not settled and I am in a big problem.*

Participant B's experience tells us how inability to give birth to a baby becomes as cause for divorce.

*I got married once. I stayed 4 years with my ex-husband and get divorced. In my marriage, I couldn't give birth to a baby. This is the reason for the dissolution of my marriage. But my ex-husband had another wife and just wanted me for my labor. He refused to share me land because I could not give birth to a baby.*

From the above, one can understand that according to the culture of the area, once a female gets married, she has to give birth to a baby within reasonable period of time. But, if she fails to give birth, she has to be replaced by another woman. According to the study, having a child to inherit the family land and to carry on the family name is a very important part of Ethiopian culture.

Participants also talked about that though it had no any ground; infidelity becomes a cause for the dissolution of their marriage. For Participant "C" it meant that when her husband return to his home, her neighbors told him that she has acquired an independent relation with other man and commit infidelity during the absence of him. This disruption of normal family life has finally led to divorce and personal demoralization. However, as she talked during the interview, it had no any ground rather than a cause for their divorce.

In addition to the above causes of divorce, participants described husband's alcohol addiction and gambling as root cause of their divorce; particularly alcohol addiction pronounced more causes of divorce include disagreements of their parent. According to account of participant "D" after the birth of her first child, her marriage began to deteriorate. Her husband was unhappy about the birth of the new baby as he had a child from another marriage, and began not coming home at night. This pattern gradually increased to the point that he only returned two nights a week. The marriage continued to deteriorate to the point that her husband began to physically abuse her.

## **Consequences of Divorce on Divorced Women**

### **Social Consequences**

The researcher was asked about the social impacts of their divorce in their post-divorce lives. Almost all the informants shared that the social impacts were the most severe consequences of their divorce. The social reactions and attitudes to their divorce intensified their personal distress to a great extent. They were faced by

social rejection because of their divorce. Some of the social consequences are presented below.

### **Social Rejection**

Some stories of interviewed women, revealed divorce resulted social rejection. Most of the informants were treated as belonging to a different group because of their divorce. They talked that divorced women are socially excluded from their married friends in many extents. They feel ashamed that they are no longer married and too frightened to make contact with old friends. At times the urge to return home to family and old friends is overwhelming but the fear of rejection prevents them from making such a move. Several of the interviewees reported that they lost many of their friends because of their divorce. Many of them were also unwilling to stay in contact with their friends. Therefore, they pulled away from their friends and social circle. Participant "A" recounts how her friends and community treat her after some days of getting divorce as follows:

*After I become a divorced woman, my relation with my friends deteriorated. Before divorce took place, I was member of social institutions like IDIR. But after I become a divorced woman, I could not. This is because of that they isolate me from such social relations as they feel that divorced women will not able to contribute all pre-conditions to the institution.*

From the above narration, one can understand that divorced women were marginalized from social institutions. Particularly, when women become divorced, they could not become members of IDIR. This is because of that their community refused them to organize with married households since they felt that they will not return the credit on time. Therefore, the social problems of rejection perpetuate their economic problems. Almost all the participants described experiences of feeling rejected, discriminated against, and socially marginalized as consequences of being divorced women. Social relations of divorced women in the area still inform they were stereotyped. Often they are seen as a threat to other people's relationships, and even though some social contexts provide a space for meeting and socializing with other people, practically it is not always easy for them to establish a social network or new friendships.

In addition, as a result of being divorced women, most of the participants lost their voice in their community. For participant "B" boys/ men tried to rape her at night, she could not tell for anyone even for police and local leaders since they blamed her for the action. Because, she already lost her social capital that most of the community members pictured her as commercial sex worker and violent. She was now suffering social isolation from social

life that results to lose her acceptance in the community.

There is a social stigma associated with divorcee women. Community disapproval is stronger for divorced women than the other forms of female heads. This study found that in the Woreda, a divorced woman is a threat to the society. It is believed among the community that she does not have good character and may negatively influence married women. This is true for participant "B" that in addition to the above social rejection, her headships face a challenge from the community. This goes to the extent of being considered as incapable of leading her household and as potential cause for the disruption of other marriages in the village. Particularly, before she gives birth, there was a problem that she faces in her headship. She really gets angry when she thinks about her female neighbors. They always lack trust on her, they suspect her as having affair with their husbands. However, she has a boy friend and she does not have any intention to snatch their husband.

Moreover, for many of the participants, even though their mothers did not say anything directly because of their affection, their siblings were annoyed at them after their divorce. Most of them shared that they did not have the same relation with their siblings as it was before divorce. Many of them identified the reasons for the bad relation with the siblings to be that their siblings were socially damaged because of their divorce. The divorce of the participants was a shame for their siblings. The story taken from the following woman illustrates this point very well.

*After my divorce, the environment in my mothers' house was unknown to me. I show a change in my brothers' and sisters' attitudes towards me. They made me understand that I am a stranger in that house. So I should stay out of many of their family matters. I did not react against this, since my children were very small and I had to stay with my mother.*

## Blame

Most of the informants shared that they were blamed for their divorce, especially by their relatives. In this regard participant "E" reported about how her siblings and parents blamed her as follows:

*My sister blamed me for her sickness. Moreover, my siblings did not try to understand what psychological pressure I was passing through. However, I accepted all this because of my children. Many of my relatives blamed me for my incapacity to continue my conjugal life. Only by seeing my relation with my ex-husband, my friends and my father, blamed me. They said that*

*you are responsible for the dissolution of your marriage, your husband is very polite and will nothing do for your divorce.*

One can understand from the above narrations that after participants were return to the house of their family, the list of blame against them was increasing in their mothers' house. Whatever problems were committed by their siblings, they were responsible for the action. However, for the security of their children, they accept all this. In addition to their siblings, for the failure of their marriage, the participants were blamed by their father. Similar sentiments were expressed by "E" in reflecting on her previous experiences of blamed through her friend's discouraging word. She expressed the way how the death of her brother becomes the source of her blame by her friends as follows:

*My relatives and friends always try to talk about my divorce and the death of my brother. I see the difference in their attitudes. They don't accuse me directly but they show me by their looks or attitudes, as if it was a question of my womanhood that I could not continue my marriage. I have isolated myself from them in every possible way to avoid these humiliations. I keep church only with a few of my closest friends.*

A number of participants also described that how different types of violence resulted blaming. This is because, they already lost their social capital that most of the community members pictured them as commercial sex worker. they conveyed that most boys in their community believed that whenever a divorced woman speak and dressed, you should first be married, not violent, silent...by basing this traditional outlooks most of boys hated them because, they can't qualified their criteria that they are divorced and violent at all.

## Challenges Related to Getting a Separate House

Many of the participants reported that they faced challenges in accessing many facilities like getting a separate house. They reported that their relation with their family was deteriorating after they moved back to their family. They tried to find a separate house for themselves but being divorced and having children, they were unable to get it. Therefore, many of them tried to find alternatives to maintain good relations with their family members by staying away from their family. The story taken from the following two women illustrates this point very well. Participant "C" conveyed the case as follows;

*A few days after my divorce, I started living in another floor of the same house, mainly to keep good relations with my siblings and mother. A few days after my divorce, my siblings told me to leave the house and found another alternative but I couldn't. This was because of that they always fear of not lost my life by my ex-husband as he warned me always to leave the house. It was difficult for me to accept those attitudes of my siblings. My mother was also silent on those situations. There emerged many conflicts between us. Since it was not possible to find a separate house for me, I started living with my ex-husband, in another floor of the same house."*

In a similar way, the difficulty of getting a separate house also talked by participant "D" that the worst problem she faced as a result of her divorce is the difficulty of getting a separate house. It was very difficult and shamed to return her parent with children after divorce. The time that she left with her parent after divorce was depressed for her. Particularly, when her siblings being angry by her children, she become upset and entertained with suicide thought.

Some of the participants were forcibly evicted from their house by their husband. As a result, they become homeless. Participant "D" described the situation in the following way: her first husband was built a house to her after their divorce. Then she began to live there with her girl. However, after she married Seteto and comes to her second divorce, he forced her to leave the house. Now she lived in one of her neighbors house which builds for cocking purpose. This condition perpetuate for the loss of her social capital as her friends far away from her because they fright to come her house.

### **Psychological consequences of divorce on divorced women**

The other identified theme was the psychological consequence of divorce on divorced women that influenced directly or indirectly them. Under this broad category, there are sub-themes which are categorized for an easy understanding. Based on the interviews conducted on divorced women, different forms of psychological consequences were identified. These forms of psychological consequences are presented below.

#### **Insulting**

Based on the in-depth interview with divorced women, insulting was identified as one form of psychological consequence. Some of the interviewed women reported

that they were experienced insulting on their life. They were experienced of insulting particularly in their business area, mostly reflected from local boys who have not any respect for women who engage in a business of selling local beers and peddlers. Participant "D" described the situation as follows: Starting from day one of her works; she has experienced insulting in the work place. Most of the perpetrators are used her color, language pronunciation, physical appearance and dressing style as a means to insult. They mostly used local words as a means to express or naming her. Although, she does have many nicknames given by those boys, she is not happy especially for the name called 'Barchi Shermutewa' (The Black Prostitute). They gave her nicknames by referring the way she pronounces words, her color, and way of treating people.

#### **Becoming a Violent**

According to the data obtained during interview, the study investigated that becoming violent in their inter-personal relationships was one of psychological consequences. In regarding to their inter-personal relationship, every little things can make them upset. They can get in to conflict with their neighbors and friends in silly reasons. For participant "A" it meant that she exposed to verbal harassment by her neighbors. She is having a wild behavior that mostly leads her to be a violent. She doesn't know what shall to do to avoid such behavior so as to live in harmony with the community. Sometimes, she cannot control her emotion and shout loudly at her girls when they have done nothing wrong. The feelings she experienced are at times so overwhelming. Participant "D" also shared the other reflection of incident violent behavior as follow:-

*I committed crime violently against a man who approached to my house to drink alcohol. The incidence was occurred when he tried to touch my physical body without my will. I tried to warn him by told that please don't touch me more than this, in opposite he tried again to kiss me. After that, there was a fire near to me that I used to boiled tea. So, I emotionally drown the fire in to his physical body...the other customers who drank there and other neighbor save him before further bad injuries. Thanks to God! I was not obeyed to pay money but by seeing my emotionality, I was arrested for the whole night in the local jail. According to police officer, I am now in last warring. Otherwise, they will be taken me in to the court. I don't know why I couldn't control my emotion.*

### Losing Confidence

Among the identified consequence of divorce on divorced women, losing confidence was categorized under psychological consequences. The trauma of separation, life as a divorced woman and try to find a niche in which to build their lives left the participants with a crisis of self confidence. With the ever-present sense of failure overshadowing daily life each of the participant talked about how their life was now full of losing confidence. For participant "G" after her divorce she lack belief in herself. When she gets in to frequent conflict with her second husband, she tried to rethink the cause of violence, which in turn drives her to lose her confidence completely. She doesn't want to get married again she was afraid of being hurt again after two failed marriage. With regarding to remarriage, she conveyed that *I do not intend to get married at this time because I think deep down I'm still afraid of commitment, afraid of being hurt again. I am afraid to commit myself to a long time love relationship. yet I cannot trust any man 100%.*

The above story shows that after divorced, women felt a deep distrust toward men, let alone thinking remarriage. However, after a while when things turned to be more normalized and their children grow, they consider remarrying. Doubts about who could be trusted further exacerbated their sense of loneliness.

In a similar way participant "H" also express her experience of being divorce and its impact on her confidence. She used to think about remarrying but she didn't think a man would accept her know that she has three children. As a divorced woman she has little chance of attracting a good man who would want to marry her. There are so many women without children from whom to choose. With each passing year, her confidence diminishes away to the point that she has more doubts than expectations. Without a husband she feels that part of her is missing. Every day she remain single, she feel incomplete and without purpose. Nothing is certain in her life. She lost trust in a man and she also lost confidence in herself;

### Feeling lonely and alone

The other forms of psychological consequence that investigated through in-depth interview were the problem of feeling lonely and alone. The majority of participants expressed that their life as divorced woman was one of feeling lonely and alone. They were now on their own. They want to be loved and taken care of to have a partner to share their life but there is no one. They feel that for the rest of their life they will not have a partner, physical or otherwise no-one to help. As a divorced woman, they have had to raise their children by themselves. What life was like for the participants were

aply described by participant "F" in positing: *life of a divorced woman is a lonely experience. It is like being a bout alone on the sea. All decision about how to survive is left to me to make by myself. It was also traumatic for me Supporting the kids alone was uphill.*

A similar sentiment is reflected in the following comment made by E:

*To be a divorced woman is a very lonely existence. For example in the past I could ask for help from my ex-husband when my son was sick. But he refused. Now my mother is the only people I feel I can call on if needed but she is not always available for the most part I have to do everything on my own.*

### Economic Consequences of Divorce on Divorced Women

The other theme that identified was economic consequences of divorce on women. Under this, there are a number of sub themes which were identified. The following were list of divorced women who narrate their lived experiences regarding to the economic consequences of divorce on them.

### Being Unproductive

Based on the data gained through in-depth interview, being unproductive is identified as parts of economic problem of divorced women. The participants were described that before being divorcee, their family was under the influence of their ex- husband. He was the main breadwinner and decision-maker in the family. Therefore, adopting a new environment of being a breadwinner is a difficult task for women with divorce. In addition, during their divorce, their ex-husband was not returning the dowry and partitioned their matrimonial equally; which resulted that their productivity in agriculture gets decreased from time to time because of lack of assets and access to resources including land. Participant "F" described the situation of how divorce becomes cause to be economically unproductive as follow:-

*Even if after my ex- husband being prison, I couldn't used his land since I fear he will be victim me while he return to his home. When I was divorcee, my ex-husband was not willing enough to provide my share, it really takes me long years to secure my legal right and I become victim of the process.*

From the above story one can understood that though

divorced women were entitled to the right to access of the land, they couldn't choose who ever she wants to be a sharecropper. This implies that in the area women yet couldn't entitled the right to control their land since their ex-husband were not interested other households to become a share cropper after divorce and women were forced to make their ex-husbands a share cropper.

In addition some of the participants were able to get land from their ex-husband, they were gave it for a share cropper. This is because of lack of ox and son. Therefore the participants were told that their productivity in agriculture was decreased by half after get divorce. For J it meant that she got land from her ex-husband and she used it as a source of income to raise her children. She has one ox, and her son plough the land by joining up with another ox from another household, literally called Kenja. The amount of production she got from the farm is very small and decreased by 50% which result being unproductive in agriculture. Because of this, during the summer season, she borrows crops from relatives since the crops which generate from her land are insufficient to feed her family annually. The size of the land is 0.5 hectare. The two eldest are ploughing the land.

On the other hand though the participants were got land from their ex-husband, they were exposed insecurity of land ownership. This also exacerbates their unproductively in agriculture. Before they got divorced their household used to have relatively enough cultivation that covered the household need, but after a share cropper started to work on their farming the production has never been enough to feed the household member. G described the situation as follows:

*After I got divorced, my late husband (1st husband) becomes my share cropper. He always fought with others who try to make share arrangement with me. He has also his own land next to mine. Since both lands are located nearby he would follow up mine as efficiently as his. But after ploughing two years I found him trying to deceive me. I have discovered that he had moved his land towards mine and took some portion from my land. At that time I did not have formal certificate that show the size and location of my land. But we have a traditional way of measuring the size and locating the position. After long time of quarrel, the neighbors tried to mediate it. But I couldn't get my portion back. Know I lost approximately 0.25 hectare. As I lost some portion of my land and being divorce and make share cropper, my agricultural productivity gets decreased.*

### **Individual Poverty**

Under economic consequence caused by divorce against

women, individual poverty is also identifies as a problem that women faced up on directly and indirectly impacted by divorce. Being divorced caused for extra expenses. Particularly for those participants who engage in informal business sectors, the problem was overwhelmed. As far as possible, they just start spending time and a lot of money to decorate them self to be attractive for their customers. Specially, they expend money to buy skirts and cosmetics from or reducing their usual asset. For them being a divorced woman were to live from hand to mouth. Right now their stress is from financial difficulties. It is hard to find a good job and take care of their children at the same time. They don't know what should do in the future. Life has become bitter. J described about the consequence of divorce in her economical status.

*As I became the sole source of income contributor for my family after divorce, it is difficult to me to meet the basic needs of my children. At the beginning my parent bring dowry to my husband and we can collect communal property. However when divorce was takes place my husband was refused to return my dowry and partitioned our communal properties equally though the law was ordered him. This condition perpetuated my individual poverty and faced a difficulty to recover after divorce.*

### **The Coping Strategies of Women with Divorce**

This section seeks to present different coping strategies that divorced women adapt to overcome the challenges of divorce. When a difficulty occurred on their daily life as divorced women, all participants described moments in which they felt able to transcend or move beyond the limitations in which they found themselves. The ability to move through and beyond the daily tribulations was achieved in a variety of ways by the participants. These ways were having faith in GOD, finding strength in the support of family and others, alimony, and working hard.

#### **Having faith in God**

Participants revealed that their ability to overcome the daily toils and stresses of being a divorced woman was not easy. Daily living was a constant struggle with self doubt and worry. Participant "C" spoke her experience of having faith in God which transformed her world as follows;

*After my divorce my world felt apart. I was rejected by one of my close friends and family. I was all alone, just me and my children. The pain was often too much. I just wanted to die. When I*

*go to the church and prayed, GOD come to my life, things began to change. Now I have a reason to live.*

The participants were spoken the importance of faith in their lives in overcoming daily difficulties or simply not giving in to the stresses of being a divorced woman. Christianity gave them a means and a confidence in believing that there is a deity who is watching over them and, with whom they could have a personal relationship—a relationship built on courage to believe there is a loving and compassionate GOD with whom they can talk via their worries and concerns without being judged or feeling guilty. For participant “B” it meant that she found solace in her Christian faith. The Christian faith taught her to face the future and not to be afraid. She usually pray and hope that everything will be all right. Her faith and the people in the church are her support without which she would not be able to survive.

In addition, the participants after they were exposed for social rejection believe that hard work and commitment would be rewarded by GOD: participant “C” describe the situation as follows:

*If I work hard and pray to GOD for guidance and support, everything will work ok. Although we worry about everyday things that won't help, it is only in having faith and praying that I can hope to overcome my difficulties. Everything is in the hands of GOD.*

### **Finding strength through support from families and others**

According to the data obtained during in-depth interview, finding strength through support from friends and others were investigated as one of coping strategies that women with divorce adopt to overcome the problem they faced. All most all the participants reported that they lived in their parents' house at the beginning of their divorce. They indicated that without the support and friendship of friends, they couldn't have overcome difficult times. Most participants found strength from their children and parents who provide great motivation to help them move forward. Participant “J” said, after she exposed for individual poverty, she expressed the way how she overcome the problem in the following manner;

*I have a very supportive family. They accepted me back and made life easier by not blaming and reminding me of the divorce. I gain great comfort from my daughter's encouraging words. She said she will not marry because she wants to stay with me and take care of me until I die. Living happily with my children and encouraging*

*by such words is the best medicine for curing my disease and overcoming the difficulties of being a divorced woman.*

Listening to women's recounts, it is possible to see that even though they mention some disadvantages, they stress how family help supports them to a great extent. Particularly, with respect to childcare women receive enormous help from their families. Due to the issue of trust participants prefer their mothers, by so doing, they in a sense, share responsibility at day times, which can give them more time and energy to spend on their work and career. F one of the participants, for example described the situation as follows;

*My mother and brother wanted me to divorce my husband more than me, but now I feel that sometimes my mother is disturbed with me. She worried about my children and me. Since my children are small, they always need someone to take care of them. Since I was working, my mother had to take care of my children. My mother felt herself overburdened with the responsibility. Whenever my mother goes to the market or somewhere else, I am an extra tension for her. I have nothing to do but accept all this.*

Although Kavas (2010) investigated that family help can be deemed as disempowering on women's parts and perpetuating women's economic dependence on men or family F'S story clearly indicates that family help came to fore as a part and parcel of coping strategy, and the participants seemed to benefit from it in terms of sharing child care responsibility with their parents. The women in the sample turned it into an advantage and living with family or living separately yet, getting help from family turned out as an empowering experience for them.

Moreover, one participant, “H” underscored another positive aspect of family help upon divorce. After her marriage was dissolved and faced financial crisis including inability to meet the basic needs of her children, one of her children was began to live with her parents in law. She had to send her daughter to her parents in law because she needed to work to start from the scratch again and to build a stable future for her daughter as well, which she now thinks is a right thing to do at that time. In addition to financial crisis, she realized that her daughter did not see any father or any male figure to socialize. So with this concern in her mind, she sends her daughter to her parents in law to her social gatherings so that her daughter could see male role models, too. The following quotations convey thus:

*My daughter lives with my parents in law. I think they substitutes the absent father figure in the family, and since they are a good model that my*

*daughter prefers them instead of her husband for her to internalize a father figure in the family.*

Therefore, although family help seems to be disempowering women as it renders them to be dependent on their family, in the sample, it turned out to be a significant dynamic that helped both materially and emotionally in the wake of divorce. Thanks to childcare help they got from their families, the participants stated that they both concentrated on their works and shared the parenting responsibility with someone they trust more.

### **Alimony**

A number of participants commented that their ability to overcome the daily toils and stresses of being a divorced woman was not easy. However, there were also moments in which hope for a better tomorrow came to the fore. Hope surfaced out of the participant's alimony from their ex-husband. Though a number of participants were decided by the court to receive alimony, they were not received it regularly. Participant "J" described her experience as follows:

*Even if the court decide to me receive a sack of Teff every two month, I receive it only three times within four year. My friends including my father told me to charge him in the court. However, I hate its process and I have not money to run it. Now I didn't ask him on the issue and I lived with the support of my father.*

Some of the participants were divorced through family arbitrator and they went to the court only to announce their divorce. They made alimony agreement without the knowledge of the court. But their agreement was not long lasting. For participant "A" it meant that her divorce was run via family arbitrator. They go to the court and renounce their divorce. After then her ex-husband vowed her to give 100 hundred birr each month without the knowledge of the court. However, after he gives it once, he refused. Now he only bought cloths for their children occasionally.

On the other hand most of the participants who had a positive relation with their ex-husband received alimony irregularly. Participant "E" had a positive relation with her ex-husband and described her experience as follows: *"I had a positive relation with my ex-husband. I have received alimony irregularly from him. He had given from a hundred to three hundred birr occasionally."*

### **DISCUSSIONS**

According to this study, attitude of men play a very

important role in separations' or divorces as relationship of women with other men or infidelity is one major cause of divorce. From the moral point of view, the principal duty created by marriage is the duty of fidelity. In this respect article 56 of the RFC stipulates that both the husband and wife owe fidelity to each other. In line to this, Khurshid & Khatoon (2012) investigated that the new age society has got numerous different avenues, which enable people to get closely acquainted. There is increased interaction in the workplace. In the day and age of mobile telephony and internet chatting, it is much easier and simpler to make friends and remain in constant touch with them. All this combined may result in lesser time for one to spend with his or her spouse and greater interaction with outsiders. This is one of the major causes for an increase in extra marital affairs and its consequent impact upon the rate of divorce.

Beside the above cause, women's infertility considered as contributor for the increasing number of divorces. When women were unable to give birth, they replaced by other women. From this, one can understand that according to the culture of the area, once a female gets married, she has to give birth to a baby within reasonable period of time. But, if she fails to give birth to a baby, she has to be replaced by another woman. Arguing in a similar way Pankhurst (1992), cited in Tizita (2013) indicated how not having a child is often given as a reason for the dissolution of marriage in Ethiopia. According to the study, having a child to inherit the family land and to carry on the family name is a very important part of Ethiopian culture.

In addition men's addiction of alcohol was investigated as one causes of divorce. When the husband began to become addicted of alcohol and extravagant, women initiate divorce. Serkalem (2006) found that starting from its formulation, there are factors that are contributing to the dissolution of marriage. One of them is men's addiction of alcohol contributed the large share to risks of divorce.

Divorce affects the relationships of divorced women with relatives and friends. Each of the participants described in different ways the experience of rejection and social isolation as a result of their status as divorced women. The social life and relationship of divorced women did have much difference from married one. There is considerable research literatures concerning divorced women which are identified Social relations about divorced women still stereotyped and even though some social contexts provide a space for meeting and socializing with other people, it is not always easy for women who are divorced to establish a social network or new friendships (Gertina van Schalkwyk, 2005). The common interest between a divorced and married women decreases which results in loose and less intimate friendships, as a result divorced women may be reticent to continue the relationship.

This study investigated that, daily living was characterized with isolating and rejecting from their relatives and friends by community members. In line to this Kavas (2010) found that after divorce, losing the existing friends and relatives come as an inevitable process, since divorced women no longer belong to the same marital status like their married friends do. There is no selective association of both groups of women with person having specific marital status. Divorced women reported less perceived social support, lower levels of social involvement and less contact with friends than married mothers (Cairney, Offord & Racine, 2003 cited in Cheeseman, Ferguson & Cohen, 2011).

However, the social relationship of divorced women does not enable them to get moral and economical support they need. While divorced women are characterized by devoting much time and resources on extending personal or family networks, they could not able to raise the social capital while being the only responsible for all needs and activities in the household, which took their time. They were rejected from social institutions. Participant A after she become divorced woman, she rejected from IDIR and unable to organize herself from the community and get loans from ACSI. In line to this Susan Erb (2011) found that divorced women and those living alone were the least likely to have retained social relation membership, due to their inability to maintain monthly payments or because they had been homeless and lacked a fixed address. In addition, another possible reason that may impede women's involvement in social life after divorce is their increased reliance on family following divorce kavas (2010). Moreover, divorced women soon discover that there is little place for them among married couples. Most of their social life is centered on activities with other divorced women.

In addition to relationship problem, the study investigated that their headships face a challenge from the community. This goes to the extent of being considered as incapable of leading their household and as potential cause for the disruption of other marriages in the village. However the experience of H and B shows that the fear of married women has no ground. But the very nature of being divorcee is taken as a good reason to suspect the divorced women of having sexual affair with married and unmarried men. Such situation makes them to have tense relation with married wife. However the fear of married women is prohibiting divorced women from getting respect for their personality and headship.

Another issue that the researcher investigated was remarriage as an important post-divorce experience. As marriage is one of the preconditions for the accusation of economic resources, divorced women are seen looking for second or third marriage, however as it was clearly analyzed some divorced women were expressing their refusal for remarriage. With respect to remarriage the

participants provided mix attitudes. While a number of women did not consider remarrying; a few number of women stated that they rate remarriage as possibility. The first and foremost of the reasons for deeming remarriage as a remote possibility was distrust in men. Some of the divorced women remember how they were badly treated in resource allocation during and after marriage and they don't want this to be repeated in their future life. The second prevailing reason for the reservations toward remarriage was presence of children. This was supported by the study of Thornton (1977), cited in kavas (2010) that children reduce the chances of getting married and lower the likelihood of remarriage for both men and women but the impact is greater on women's probability of remarriage.

One that is unique from the literature is that a participant was faced a difficulty of remarriage since their ex-husband prevent them from it. A participant, F didn't want for remarry since her ex-husband always boasted that if someone marry her he will be kill him and her.

The major social problem that the researcher investigated was the challenges of getting a separate house. Even though, the right to adequate housing is clearly recognized in international human rights law, including in the International covenant on economic, social and cultural rights and Ethiopia is currently members of it, yet, after their divorce, all most all the participants were unable to found a separate house. This is because their spouses were not interested to give the house for women during divorce. Further, most of the divorced women were forcibly evicted or displaced from their homes. Therefore in Motta Woreda and particularly in Addis Zemen Kebele administration, still women are expected to displace from their homes during their divorce.

The economic problem of divorced women particularly those with children are more serious. The sole responsibility to raise children is fully on the mother with limited child support from ex-husbands. The study investigated that after divorce women became the sole source of income contributor for their family. it is difficult to meet the basic needs of their children. In line to this Kotwal and Prabhakar (2009) revealed that financial problems were the main stressor for majority of divorced women. It became very difficult for the mothers to meet the basic needs of children such as food and clothing and maintaining the previous standard of living and meet personal expenses, with the situation of economic problems and limited resources. In a similar way Smyth and Weston (2000) found that divorce typically creates an economic crisis since the money that supported one family is usually insufficient to meet the costs of two newly formed households, one of which often includes children.

The other causes of financial difficulties of the participants was that before legislatures equalized

property allocation between both spouses, many divorce statutes substantially favored property allocation to the husband. These statutes greatly disadvantaged women disproportionately. Though under Ethiopia's Constitution (1994) article 35, No (7) women have an equal right with men to use, transfer, administer and control of land, they were unable to get their half property equally, including land. The participants, who were engaged in farming, are not satisfied with the system of distribution of land and amount of production. This is mainly because of inability to get land from their ex- husband, shortage of male labor and less quality of land. This situation perpetuates their economic crisis. Therefore despite the constitutional provision of land, the different customary rules and long processes of the court in the Woreda make divorced women resource poor or failed to effectively use their ownership right.

After their divorce, the participants were engaged with informal sectors. They prepared local beers, such as Tella and Katicala and sold it. They also collect wood from desert and sold it. These informal sectors are a means in which the participants were used as a means of survival strategies. Economic challenge and difficulty of divorced women is explained as one divorced woman indicated that "KEJI WEDAF YEHONE NURO" which is meaning that whatever she gets is spent on a daily basis for food. This was supported by Serkalem (2006) concluded that divorced women in Ethiopia are economically weak and usually engage in informal sectors like selling home made products, collecting wood and retailing activities after divorce.

From observed cases in Motta family court, the majority of women were appealing to the court to share properties and money they have accumulated over the years during marriage. Among examined divorce files, which was accessible the majority of the cases were disputes over economical issues. Among the process of divorce settlement divorce pronouncement is much easier. However, post divorce processes that are issue of child custody, child support and property settlement are still taking time. After the pronouncement of divorce, the maintenance fee to women delayed which aggravates the post divorce condition of the women. Then the process to get child support and share property for many women is a difficult task.

In addition to economic consequences, the majority of participants expressed that their life as a divorced woman was one of feeling lonely and alone. They were now on their own. Because of their social status as a divorced woman, it was difficult to feel equal to others. Most of divorced women experienced depression as an impact to their life. For a number of participants they were always vulnerable to depression which resulted as a result of their financial crisis. A number of studies were located which identified depression as a major outcome of economic crisis and family stress in divorced woman

families. The findings of this study is consistent with the findings of Hong (2011) which found depression to be present in the majority of the participants which appeared to result from the trauma and stress associated with daily living.

This article investigated that their ability to overcome the daily toils and stresses of being a divorced woman were not easy. Every day had its dark moments in which life seemed difficult: however, there were also moments in which hope for a better tomorrow came to the fore. The participants, who emphasized their financial concern in the wake of divorce, came up with different strategies to alleviate their financial worries. Family help was one mechanism these women drew on for a short period of time at least until they recovered financially. The majority of the participants overcame the initial stage of post divorce period with the help of their families; this ranged from living with parents until feeling self sufficient financially or until arranging a separate living to getting help in childcare and gets a separate house.

Majority of the participants lived separately yet received childcare help from their families. This is consistent with prior research Bharti Sharma (2011) that women rely on support from friends and family members if available to cope with the psychological stress of divorce and financial worries. Further, maximum divorced women were living with their parents while minimum were living independently with their own children. This may be attributed to the fact that Hulet Ejjū Enessie Woreda is still a conservative society and women were not allowed to live on their own (without men).

The major source of help available from family members for divorced women is the support from their fathers and grown up sons. Sons are taking the major burden of farming activity and investing more time in ploughing. The participant said that male children who are fourteen and above are highly motivated to provide labor to maintain security of them. Female heads that have adult son express their feeling that the presence of an adult son provides them a safe condition from incurring costs to the share cropper. For them once the son reached fourteen he is not little anymore; he can represent the family and become source of respect.

The study also investigated that having faith in GOD as one of coping strategies that women with divorce adopt. The participants spoke of their life prior to turning to GOD for help. Daily living was a constant struggle with self doubt and worry. Having faith in GOD was a sustaining force for them.

A few participants told that even if it is not regular, they adapt alimony as coping strategies though in some circumstances they had to file a lawsuit to family court again requesting the alimony be paid regularly.

## CONCLUSION

This study attempts to investigate the challenges of divorce; the economic, psychological and social impact of divorce on divorced women and the mechanisms used to adopt life after divorce.

A number of participants tend to characterized the divorce experience in terms of its negative effects on themselves and stated that the feeling of self blame and grief were prevalent after divorce. The economic and social problem of divorce create psychological problem on them. This is as explained by cases due to the frustration to cope and handle the life after divorce especially with children. Though divorced women worked hard and tried their best to rear their children, it could be concluded that majority of them faced, psychological and social problems.

The study investigated that significant psychological stress in relation to their family support and the social view of their divorce is found to be prevalent in divorced women. When the informants were asked about the psychological impacts of their divorce, most of them reported that the divorce left them with pain, anxiety, and uncertainty and with the feeling of failure because they had not been able to continue their marriage for the rest of their life. Moreover, the social attitudes towards them and their family, and the unpleasant relations within the family as a consequence of the social stigma of their divorce, made them exhausted in their post divorce life.

Thus for them, the main challenges after divorce came from the social sphere. They were much more upset and ashamed about their divorce because of the social reactions. Many of the informants reported that others did not blame them directly; nevertheless people always showed curiosity to discuss their divorce, which was embarrassing to them. Many of them reported that they wanted to forget the chapter of divorce in their life.

For divorced women, beginning a new life is difficult in rural society. Divorced women argued that unlike the married one, they didn't get any support from the society to share their property and to begin new life. Except for their close family members they cannot get the support of people to help them to defend their right of division of property and secure their means of livelihood. They are also unable to use their social relation to negotiate their right.

Though they adopt different coping strategies to overcome the problem, they never escaped from it. Some of the participants were highly lean towards their parent after divorce. This is because of that they were unable to get a separate house to live alone. This is the major challenge for women with divorce. Some of the participants were received alimony from their ex-husband. However, though the court decides for them to receive it, their ex-husband was not pay regularly. This condition exacerbates their economic crisis and forced

them to live with their parent.

Therefore the women in the sample developed coping of strategies in addition to work such as getting family help and alimony. Although these two factors seems to be disempowering women for they render women to be dependent on husband or parents, in this case specifically family help turned out to be a significant dynamic that helped both materially and emotionally in the wake of divorce. Thanks to childcare help they got from their families, the participants stated that they both concentrated on their works and shared the parenting responsibility with someone they trust more.

Generally, this paper argues that the study of divorced women lived experiences helps to adequately understand the situation of divorced women in general and divorced women in Hulet Ejju Enessie Woreda, in particular. Thus, divorced women deserve greater attention and need intervention and treatment efforts to improve their economic and social outcomes.

## Implications

The findings of this study have shown that divorced women were exposed for social, economic as well as psychological problems. Even though they were adopting different coping strategies to tackle the problems, they never escaped from it. This indicates that, despite the increasing concern for the socio-economic empowerment of women from both the Federal and local governments, it still needs a practical step forward from all concerned bodies. In light of this, the following possible interventions were forwarded.

- ❖ Because of the traditional cultures of the society, divorced women were unable to develop social capitals, as they were isolated from IDIR and community participation. Therefore the Woreda as well as Kebele administrators have to be giving special attention for them and enhance the development of community support networks which can reduce social isolation and marginalization for them. To do so the Kebele administrator should be organize women to create their own social institutions, such as IDIR and IKUB.

- ❖ For a number of participants they were always vulnerable to Feeling lonely and alone and losing confidence which resulted as a result of their financial crisis and their financial crisis were in turn resulted from insecurity of their land. Therefore the Kebele administrator should be responsible for the security of their land rather than blamed them.

- ❖ Even though the Woreda court decide for women to get alimony after their divorce, practically they were not received it. In addition even if some of them

received, it is not regular. This situation perpetuates their economic problem. Therefore the court should be take measurable action within a short period of time.

❖ Many of the divorced women were found to be relying on agriculture and insecure income source such as daily labor and other informal activities mainly preparing local bears to make their living. Thus local governments and NGOs should facilitate the way that, these endangered families could get access to more secured income sources. Organizing divorced women in micro and small enterprises and providing them with market places, entrepreneurial skills as well as better access to credit services could be possible interventions in this regard

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