

# The Causes and Consequences of Girls Child Marriage in Ethiopia

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I hereby certify that I have read and evaluated this thesis entitled “**The causes and consequences of girls’ child marriage in Ethiopia**” prepared under my supervision by Miresa Tolu Afeta. I recommend that it be submitted as fulfilling the thesis requirement.

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## **Biographical Sketch**

I was born on the African Continent, Ethiopia, Oromia National Regional State, Jimma Geneti district in 1990 G. C from my father Tolu Afeta and my mother Jimmawork Hailu. I attended my elementary education at Bikila Nagaro elementary school in Bikila Nagaro kebele, and my high school and preparatory school education at Hareto senior secondary school in Hareto town.

After successfully passing the Ethiopian higher education entrance examination in 2008, I joined Haramaya University in the 2009 academic year and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Gender and Development in the year 2011. Then, I worked as a Graduated Assistant and Assistant Lecturer for three years at Haramaya University. I joined the same university, Department of Sociology, in 2014 for postgraduate study and Graduated in Master of Arts Degree in Sociology on July 5, 2018. I joined the European Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women and Gender Studies in September 2018. Then, I attended my first-year GEMMA program at Lodz University (Poland) and my second-year GEMMA program at Utrecht University (the Netherlands).

I chose to study the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia for my masters thesis because of two reasons. First, the story of my sister, Mastawot Tolu, who was also one of my case study informants has always revolved in my mind and motivated me to research about girls' child marriage. Second, currently, the participation of women in core areas in Ethiopia has been increasing. For example, nowadays in Ethiopia the president, the minister of health and so on are women. My expectation was to see the lower prevalence of girls' child marriage in the 2019 report because the participation of women in parliament may reduce the rate of harmful traditional practices like girls' child marriage in the country. However, the UNICEF report of 2019 showed that the prevalence of girls' child marriage was higher in the country. Because of these reasons, I had decided to research the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia.

### ***Abstract***

*Marriage of girls less than 18 years is a fundamental violation of their human rights. Besides, it affects their socioeconomic statuses. Therefore, this study was intended to investigate the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia. In this study, a qualitative research approach was used. The primary data were collected using in-depth interviews, Focus Group discussion, and Case studies. The secondary data were collected through critical reviews of books, NGO reports, governmental reports and journal articles. The findings of the study revealed that child marriage practice is still prevalent in Ethiopia due to poverty, illiteracy, child bride, virginity, family honor, and gender inequality. Moreover, this study shows that health-related problems, illiteracy/lower educational status, lower economic status, gender inequality, and lower opportunity to make the decision are identified as the consequence of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia. Therefore, there should be more commitment from governmental and non-governmental organizations towards the eradication of girls' child marriage practice. Moreover, society should also be given awareness about the negative consequences of girls' child marriage in order to eliminate the practice.*

*Keywords: Ethiopia, Girls Child Marriage, Gender inequality, NGOs.*

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1. Background of the study**

Child marriage occurs in practically every region of the world, but it is most common in South Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Africa (Malhotra, 2010; UNICEF, 2012; Mahato, 2016). Globally, 650 million girls and women alive today were married before their 18th birthdays, a third even before their 15th birthdays. And, without major efforts to stop child marriage worldwide, another 150 million girls are expected to be married as children by 2030 (UNICEF, 2019). Child marriage affects the child's freedom to choose when and whom to marry. Child marriage, which frequently inhibits a child's basic rights to health, education, and security, is included in international conventions like Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (1990) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979) (UNICEF, 2012). Child marriage practice mostly affects girls and is especially prevalent in low and lower-middle-income countries (Wodon, et al., 2017).

Child marriage, defined as marriage before the age of 18 years, continues to be prevalent in Africa, where almost 40% of girls marry before reaching this age (John, et al., 2019; UNICEF, 2014). Child marriage is a violation of human rights. Every child has the right to be protected from this harmful practice, which has devastating consequences for individuals and society (Chowdhury and Morium, 2018; Wodon, et al., 2018). Child marriage is now firmly on the global development agenda, most permanently through its inclusion in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.3, which aims to eliminate the practice by 2030 (UNICEF, 2018; Wodon, et al., 2017). However, investments to end child marriage practice remains limited (Wodon, et al., 2018).

Child marriage which leads to severe violation of girls' human rights needs serious attention in Ethiopia where there is still higher prevalence of the practice. Therefore, in this study, I focus on the analysis of the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage, which is one of the harmful traditional practices in Ethiopia. Even though Ethiopia adopted a national strategy against harmful traditional practices in 2013, but

more could be done to end these harmful traditional practices (Wodon, et al., 2018). Though it is illegal for children under 18 to marry, and awareness of the law is increasing, millions of Ethiopian girls remain at risk of being wed as children increasing their vulnerability to adolescent pregnancy, maternal mortality, gender-based violence, illiteracy and poverty (John, et al., 2019; Nicola, et al., 2016). According to the UNICEF report of 2019, the percentage of women in Ethiopia aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before ages 15 and 18 are 14 and 40 percent respectively. The recent study also shows that the prevalence of child marriage was 167(44.8%) in the North-Western part of Ethiopia. The minimum and maximum ages at first marriage were 9 and 23 years respectively (Bezie and Addisu, 2019). Moreover, in Ethiopia, the study shows that child marriage has adverse health, social and economic consequences for child brides, their parents, and the community (John, et al., 2019). Further, evidence also suggests that most girls who marry at an early age come from poor families, have limited opportunities for schooling, live in rural areas and have limited labor force participation (UNICEF, 2014; Parsons et al., 2015; Erulkar, 2013; John et al., 2019).

Most previous studies in Ethiopia were based on the indicator of child marriage set by UNICEF in 2003 which is not up to date. That means the average number of child marriage in the findings of previous studies is calculated for all women aged 15 to 45 years who were being married or in union before the age of 18 years. However, the recent and most commonly used measure for the percentage of child marriage in a given country or region is the one that is set by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5. 3.1) (Wodon, et al., 2018). According to SDG, the average percentage of child marriage for a given country or region is calculated as the number of women aged 20 to 24 who were first married or in union before age 15 (or before age 18) divided by the total number of women aged 20 to 24 in the population multiplied by 100 (UNICEF, 2019). Moreover, recent studies were more focused on quantitative research about the prevalence of child marriage, relationship quality, and health consequences of child marriage in Ethiopia (John et al., 2019; Bezie and Addisu, 2019). Therefore, in this study, I focus to fill the gap by exploring the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia in line with the current indicator of the Sustainable Development Goal. To do so, I divide this study into six substantive chapters. The first chapter, which is the introductory chapter, provides the background

information of the study. The second chapter is about the review of relevant literature. The third chapter is about research methodology. The fourth and fifth chapters are about the results and discussion of the study. Particularly, chapter four deals with the root causes of girls' child marriage whereas chapter five is concerned with the consequences of girls' child marriage on their life statuses in Ethiopia. The sixth and final chapter provides conclusions regarding the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia.

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

Child marriage is among the many factors that highly affect girls' life status in Ethiopia (Nayak, 2013). Discussions on the position of the girls in third world countries including Ethiopia often suggest that the main reason for taking interest in child married girls is to reduce their higher fertility and providing good conditions for their children (John, et al., 2019). Programs to examine the impacts of child marriage on girls' education, paid employment, health, and social status or linked to the analysis of their participation in public life and family issue are not designed to be taken into account in most cases (Helen, 2006). Because of the cultural and traditional beliefs which encourage child marriage, girls face a high mortality rate during their childbearing periods and are hindered to participate in activities that improve their life statuses such as education, income-generating jobs, recreation, field works and others (Helen, 2006).

The contribution of girls to the economic, health, social, cultural, and political well-being of the country is essential. Rather than valuing and strengthening their critical contribution, and giving them a better position, in most cases, societies give a low status for girls in Ethiopia. One of the main reasons for this is child marriage which many societies accept as the normal way of life for girls. Therefore, there is a need to explore the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia that affect girls, which makes it impossible for them to progress in their life.

## **1.3. Research Objective**

This study has both general and specific objectives.

### **1.3.1. General objective**

The general objective of the study is to analyze the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia.

### **1.3.2. Specific objectives**

This study has two specific objectives:

1. To analyze the root causes of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia
2. To analyze the consequences of girls' child marriage on their life statuses in Ethiopia.

### **1.4. Research Question**

To fulfill the purpose of this study, the following research questions are designed:

1. What are the root causes of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia?
2. What are the consequences of girls' child marriage on their life statuses in Ethiopia?

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

This study has designed to examine the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia. Analyzing the root causes of child marriage and its consequences help to eliminate child marriage practice in the future by changing the sociocultural practices that are perpetuating girls' child marriage in Ethiopia. Therefore, this study has the following significance:

1. The study helps in providing insight with the way child marriage negatively affects the girls' rights to achieve their goals (education, good health, good economic status, and others);
2. The study may also have a great practical significance in providing vital information about the extent of the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage for educational planners, decision-makers, social workers, employing agencies, health sectors and others in this area;

3. The procedures that are followed, and the results that are obtained may assist researchers and highlight areas of focus for further research on the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage;

4. It may also provide suggestions for minimizing girls' child marriage practice in the future.

### **1.6. Scope of the Study**

In this research, I focus to analyze the root causes of girls' child marriage and its consequences on the life status of girls who were married at childhood in Ethiopia. Even though the problem considers all girls who were married before eighteen years, it is impossible to cover all of them because of the largeness of the population.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter deals with a literature review about girls' child marriage. The sub-topics of the chapter includes marriage practices in Ethiopia, and the concept of child marriage, which is further divided into sub-topics that incorporates child marriage in the realm of International conventions and child marriage in the Ethiopian context.

### 2.1. Marriage practices in Ethiopia

Marriage is a social institution that unites people in a special form of mutual dependence for the founding and maintaining a family (Nayak, 2013). It is the institution that seems to be common in all cultures all over the world even if the type may be nuclear in some cultures and extended in others (Augustyniak, 2009).

Marriage is also defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary as the state of being united to a person as a spouse in a consensual, legal, and contractual relationship which is sanctioned and recognized by and only dissolvable by law (Wodon and Nguyen, 2015). Marriage also plays social and economic functions (Kassegne, et al., 2018). A wedding ceremony, which is an important part of marriage, is a social event for spouses' families, neighbors, and relatives. Besides, marriage helps the family to shift the responsibility of helping daughters to husbands (Kassegne, et al., 2018). I argue that the importance of marriage as the social institution and primary socialization agent is an undeniable fact though the way different societies decide how it is practiced is varied and leads to various consequences. Particularly, in Ethiopia, most societies accept the marriage practice that limits the girls' rights to get various services such as education, economic empowerment, decision-making, and others. Such marriage practice is mostly taken place without the decision and the interest of the girls' child. A similar study also shows that various marriage practices across ethnic groups and religions in Ethiopia are mostly arranged by parents, with very shorter engagement periods (Larsen and Tilson, 2000).

There are various marriage practices and ceremonies in Ethiopia. These are 'Bethortal' (*Naqataa or sirat*), arranged marriage (*sabbat-marii*), 'wish' (*hawwii or mignot*), Abduction (*Butii or telefa*), *Aseennaa or kalkidan and Dhaala or wurs* (Beyene and Tolera, 2006; Augustyniak, 2009). Though these marriage types are almost common in the country, they have different practices and ceremonies in the

different regions of the country. ‘Bethortal’ is the most common form of marriage mostly arranged by the parents of the spouses with a great deal of negotiation (Beyene and Tolera, 2006; Augustyniak, 2009). ‘Arranged marriage’ (*Sabbat Marii*) is the second most frequently practiced types of marriage in Ethiopia. It is a less forceful marriage practice. It is not based on the full agreement of the parents of the bride. It is requesting the girl for marriage without the prior appointment and the interest of the bride's family. This means the groom stays for certain days around the house of the bride’s family with some of his friends and requests her family to marry her. If the bride’s parent does not accept the request on the first round, he has to stay around their home and keep requesting through elders. Finally, the family of the bride has to allow him to marry their daughter because it is culturally impossible not to accept the decision of elders.

‘Wish’/ *Hawwii/mignot* is a type of marriage that is common among poor people and it is the secret selection type of marriage. ‘Abduction’ (*butii/telefa*) is the type of marriage, which is done by force. It is a marriage practice when the boy is refused by either the girl's parents or by the girl herself and sometimes if the boy is asked too much money as a bride-wealth and different kind of gifts which he cannot afford to pay (Beyene and Tolera, 2006; Augustyniak, 2009). ‘Entry’ (*Aseennaa/kalkidan*) is a marriage practice for a woman who remains unmarried into her twenties is incomprehensible. The other type of marriage practice is *Dhaalaa (wurs)* which means “inheritance”. It is a type of marriage practice between a woman and the brother of the dead husband. *Dhaala* marriage is practiced to preserve the children of dead men within the family and protect them from mistreatment by the stepfather to whom the widow may marry (Beyene and Tolera, 2006).

The aforementioned types of marriage practices are encouraging child marriage though the degree of practice is varied. For example, in ‘bethortal’ type of marriage practice child marriage is less practiced whereas in ‘abduction’ (*buti/telefa*) type of marriage practice child marriage is more practiced.

## **2.2. The concept of Child Marriage**

Child marriage is a marriage in which a child under the age of 18 years is involved and it is still practiced in all over the world, but highly practiced in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Mahato, 2016; Bruce,2005; Mandali, 2013; John, et al.,



2019). Moreover, UNICEF gives a slightly more specific definition of child marriage as “a formal marriage or informal union before the age of 18” that occurs throughout the world (Blomgren, 2013; UNICEF, 2019). This definition draws from various treaties, conventions and international agreements like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the UN Human Rights Council (UNICEF, 2014; Suresh Lal, 2016). Though most countries accept the minimum legal age of marriage as 18 years and included in their family code/law, I argue that the application is very low. For example, in the case of Ethiopia even though the above international conventions that are completely against the practice of girls' child marriage were accepted, girls' child marriage is still practiced in the country and leads to various problems in the lives of girls.

It is undeniable fact that marriage before 18 years can have large negative consequences on a wide range of other outcomes for child married girls and their children. For instance, 18 years is the age of completing secondary schools in Ethiopia and other countries. So, when girls marry before 18 years, it limits/reduces the opportunity that they will be able to complete their secondary education. Besides, young girls are often not able to give their free and full consent to their marriage. Similarly, Wodon et al. (2017) suggest that girls younger than 18 are often too young for marital, sexual, and reproductive responsibilities. Moreover, it is clearly shown that child marriage, a marriage that happens before the age of 18, is a fundamental violation of human rights. I believe that human beings have the right to decide their life including when and whom to marry, even sometimes not to marry at all. On the contrary, most young girls are forced to enter into a marriage which is not their choice and against the rule of law. This affects a girl's development by resulting in, social exclusion, and early pregnancy, interrupting her education, restricting her chance for career and vocational advancement, and putting her at a higher risk of intimate partner violence. Consistently, UNICEF (2019) reports that in many cultures, when girls reach puberty age, they are expected to accomplish gender roles associated with womanhood like entering a union and becoming a wife and mother.

In most societies including Ethiopia, the main attention given for many girls is not to boost their educational statuses and make their future life bright and meaningful. Rather, strengthening and implementing what preexisting sociocultural factors have

been identified as the role of girls is mostly manifested in many societies. Similarly, literature shows that cultural and social norms influence the age at which a girl is expected to marry. Moreover, educational status, socio-economic status, and community situation also affect the probability of being married at an early age (Suresh Lal, 2016; Klugman et al., 2014). Child marriage is also seen as one of the most harmful manifestations of the unbalanced power relations between women and men. Child marriage practice often means for the girl life of unsecured sexual and economic servitude. Therefore, the subordination of women is both a cause and consequence of child marriage (UNICEF, 2008). Child marriage, in many situations, marks an abrupt transition into a sexual relationship with a husband who is considerably older and not chosen. The younger a bride is, the larger the age difference between her and her spouse (Nayak, 2013).

I argue that girls' child marriage has a devastating consequence on the life of child married girls because it has limited their opportunity to enjoy the success and benefits that other girls get. For example, uneducated girls cannot get good health service and happy life that educated girls get in their lifetime. Similarly, studies show that Child marriage is a human rights violation that directly affects girls' educational status, health status, psychological well-being, and the health of their offspring (UNICEF, 2008; Nour, 2009; Mahato, 2016). Even if boys can be affected, the practice mostly affects girls (Mandali, 2013). I agree with Mandali's argument because as far as my knowledge as an Ethiopian Social science student is concerned, almost in all situation boys are given primary position and the practice of boys child marriage is almost non-existent in Ethiopia. There is a belief that boys should at least have basic needs before entering into marriage. To have their own basic needs they have to be educated or engaged in other activities and get the secured means of generating income to support their wives and children in marriage. Until they fulfill these needs when they pass eighteen years and consequently free from child marriage. On the contrary, there is a belief that girls should be supported by their families or husbands and there is no need for girls to have secured means of income. This indirectly perpetuated girls' child marriage.

Child marriage is often referred to as "early and forced" marriage because, the girls, given their young age are not physically or mentally ready and can hardly make a free and informed decision concerning their marriage spouse, the timing, or the

implications of this binding commitment. An element of enforcement is also involved because their parents force their girls' children into marriage. Consistently, the study shows that powerful social and cultural norms also cause the practice despite legislation in place (Mandali, 2013) and girls who marry at their child age are also forced to give birth before their bodies are fully matured and therefore, they are at risk of death or terrible injury and illness during childbirth (Malhotra, 2010).

Child marriage is also associated with losses in agency and decision-making powers for women later in their life because child married girls have low confidence and self-esteem. This is why Parson et al. (2015) justified that, in most cases, child brides are often vulnerable, and they are young, often poorly educated, and from unprivileged socio-economic backgrounds. I agree with Parson and others arguments because young married girls fall more under the control of their husbands and in-laws than would be the case if they had married later. Moreover, the study shows that child marriage hinders their aspirations, as well as the agency for girls (Klugman et al., 2014) and this will possibly hinder their decision-making power, including access to health care during pregnancy and childbearing. This shows that a woman's ability for choice depends on the agency, access to resources like land, livestock, cash, and past achievements.

### **2.2.1. Conceptualizing Child marriage in the realm of International conventions on Human Rights**

As discussed above, child marriage is widespread in human rights violations. It is a constraint to economic, social, and political development, and it is rooted in gender inequality. Consistently, previous studies show that child marriage is perpetuated by the low value placed on girls and women in societies where the practice is common. In line with this, in 1945, the U.N. Charter affirmed faith in fundamental human rights and the equal rights of women and men encouraged respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to sex. It declared child marriage as a violation of human rights (Suresh Lal, 2016 and Nour, 2009). A feminist legal methodology also tries to recapture the experiences of women in a way that women's rights become fundamental to the law. Laws and interpretation of laws that do not take into consideration a gender perspective fails to understand the reality of women's lives and the implications laws have on women's and children's lives and perpetuate

and further perpetuate the practice of gender discrimination and violence against women (UNICEF, 2008). Besides, child marriage has grown mainly due to an account of women's absence from lawmaking because traditionally law and practice is made in the image of the male and therefore, child marriage disproportionately affects girls because of their sex and despite facially neutral laws, women and girls are often de facto unequal before the law. That is why apart from specific child marriage laws, laws relating to prohibitions against discrimination on the ground of sex and age must be strengthened to strike out the main causes of child marriage (UNICEF, 2008). I agree with this argument because the participation of women in lawmaking and interpretation is very crucial to change the image that societies have towards girls' children. For example, in the case of Ethiopia, still today the participation of women in parliament and other critical issues that can transform the preexisting inequalities is very low. Due to the deep-rooted nature of patriarchy, which society sometimes believe as something natural, changing the system and creating the world that is equally serving men and women is still an unfinished project. The following are the discussion of some international conventions concerning child marriage practices.

#### **2.2.1.1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Provisions Relating to Child Marriage**

The UDHR promoted the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of men and women. It specified sex as being among the impermissible grounds of differentiation and provided an equal protection clause. Even though the Universal Declaration does not in and of itself have a legal effect on all states, it is morally persuasive and is considered part of customary international law. Provisions for equality of the sexes in the enjoyment of rights are provided for in all the major human rights covenants of the United Nations (UNICEF, 2008).

#### **The UDHR Provisions Relating to Child Marriage**

Article 16:

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality, or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during the marriage, and at its dissolution (Assembly, 1948, p. 3). I argue that in this article the term 'full age' means at least 18 years. Besides, both

couples have the right to decide issues related to their marriage. However, in Ethiopia, there is a higher prevalence of girls' child marriage compared to boys. Moreover, the right of girls to marriage and in marriage is taken from them and consequently, many girls become brides before they turn 18 years old.

2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending parties (Assembly, 1948, p. 3). I understand from this article as marriage is the union of two couples based on their free and full agreement. This means, the marriage never be forced or arranged. But, in Ethiopia, most marriages are forced and arranged for girls. Marriage is decided based on the interest of the family and boys than girls.

Similar provisions are included in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Even if Ethiopia adopted UDHR conventions that give equal rights, full consents and full age (at least 18 years) for both spouses to enter into marriage, girls' child marriage is highly practiced in Ethiopia.

#### **2.2.1.2. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was carefully drafted over the course of ten years from 1979 to 1989. In 1989, the CRC defined a child as “every human being below the age of 18 years” (art.1) (Bhabha, 2006). Though many countries including Ethiopia have laws that decide the minimum legal age of marriage to 18 years, the enforcement of the laws is very weak. The CRC recognizes that children are entitled to human rights in their own right. Thus, the CRC reflects a movement away from the view of the child as a recipient of privileges bestowed at the discretion of the family, community, and the State towards a more progressive view of the child as the bearer of legal rights under international law (Nour, 2009).

#### **The CRC Provisions Related to Child Marriage (UNICEF, 1989):**

Article 1: A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, the majority is attained earlier (UNICEF, 1989, P.2).

Article 2: Freedom from discrimination on any grounds, including sex, religion, ethnic or social origin, birth, or other statuses (P.2).

Article 3: In all actions concerning children...the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration (P.2).

Article 12: The right to express his or her views freely in all matters affecting the child in accordance with age and maturity (P.4).

Article 19: The right to protection from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parents, guardian or any other person (P.5).

Article 24: The right to health and to access to health services; and to be protected from harmful traditional practices (P.7).

Articles 28 and 29: The right to education based on an equal opportunity (P.8, P.9).

My argument is that even though Ethiopia is one of the signatory countries of CRC, children in Ethiopia, mainly girls, are exposed to exploitation and violence. For example, article 2 above shows the freedom of child from discrimination, but child married girls have encountered discrimination in marriage. Moreover, article twelve above declares the right to freely express issues affecting their lives. On the contrary, child brides are entered into marriage without their interest and decision. So, the right to decide issues affecting their lives is violated. Articles 19, 24, 28, and 29 similarly declare the freedom of children from violence, harmful traditional practices, and the right to education and others. On the contrary, girls' child marriage takes away these rights and freedoms from child brides because the majority of child brides are physically and sexually abused and denied attending schools and boost their economic status.

### **2.2.1.3. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**

The necessity to guarantee the equality of women and men was recognized long before the introduction of CEDAW in 1979. The document of the United Nations, which was adopted in 1945, has laid down under its preamble equal rights for women as one of its basic principles (Alemu, 2002). As a result, CEDAW was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1979. The declaration of CEDAW was the culmination of the efforts of the global women's human rights movement to bring

together in a single document a charter of women's rights. It gives voice to the concept that women's rights are human rights. The convention seeks to implement women's rights to equality in areas ranging from political participation to employment opportunities to women's reproductive rights and articulates the value of ensuring women's social and cultural equality by revising social and cultural patterns of conduct that lead to stereotyped roles and unequal power relations between the men and women. To realize women's rights, the CEDAW calls upon state parties to adopt enabling legislation prohibiting discrimination against women and to take “all appropriate” measures to eliminate discrimination (UNICEF, 2008). However, I argue that the CEDAW convention which gave attention towards the emancipation of women and gender equality failed to meet its goals in Ethiopia because gender inequality and violence against women and girls exist still today.

The CEDAW Convention was focused to eliminate formal discrimination and that of de facto. It seeks to eliminate discrimination both from reality and the law. Hence, it obligates states to give both legal guarantees of equality and to ensure the enjoyment of those formally guaranteed rights by women. In other means, for example as Tomasevski (1999) shows states must provide legislation proclaiming the equal rights of women, and they are also expected to take a combination of different measures to realize the elimination of discrimination against women and the actual realization of the rights guaranteed. Since child marriage is one of the factors affecting women's rights and their life statuses, CEDAW defers the legalization of child marriage (Nour, 2009).

**Particular CEDAW conventions related to child marriage include:**

Article 16 (1) States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular, shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women (UN, 1993, p.6):

- (a) The same right to enter into marriage;
- (b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;
- (c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution;



(d) The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases, the interests of the children shall be paramount;

(e) The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education, and means to enable them to exercise these rights;

(f) The same rights and responsibilities concerning guardianship, wardship, trusteeship, and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases, the interests of the children shall be paramount;

(g) The same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession, and an occupation;

(h) The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment, and disposition of property, whether free of charge or for a valuable consideration.

I understand from the aforementioned articles of CEDAW that theoretically both spouses have equal rights to decide when and whom to marry; issues in marriage and access and control over properties produced in marriage. This theoretically declared law is very gender-sensitive and welcoming. However, when it comes to practice in particular to Ethiopia the reverse is true. I mean, the issue regarding marriage time, whom to marry, and properties in marriage are controlled mostly by men. So, there is a huge gap between theoretically set rights and the actual use of that right.

Article 16 (2) states 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 and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory (UN, 1993, p.7). Disdain the endowed equal rights CEDAW articles allow for both spouses to enter into marriage and after marriage, most girls in Ethiopia are forced to enter into child marriage because of the lack of strong systems that implements these rights for girls.



#### **2.2.1.4. International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**

The Political Covenant's Human Rights Committee has developed interpretations of its substantive articles by issuing general comments. Comment 4/13 interprets Article 3, which requires states to ensure for all individuals the rights recognized in the Political Covenant as imposing a positive obligation on states to remedy sex discrimination. This positive obligation requires not only that states take measures to protect women, such as the enactment of laws, but also to take measures of affirmative action designed to ensure the positive enjoyment of rights. It also imposes on states a duty to obtain information regarding the role of women in its jurisdiction to determine specifically what additional measures need to be taken (UNICEF, 2008).

I agree that affirmative action is positive discrimination. It helps previously underprivileged women to get privileged status. However, the status of women in Ethiopia shows that women have unprivileged status, and what is called affirmative action is only on paper. From this, I would argue that Ethiopia adopts international laws that sound good regarding the rights of women but when it comes to practice it needs more work and commitment.

#### **2.2.2. Child marriage in the Ethiopian context**

Since the ratification of the UN convention on the right of the child in 1989, significant progress has been shown in advancing children's rights to enjoy economic and social rights like access to basic health care and education (Brouard, 2016). However, child marriage which negatively affects girls' rights to economic, political, and social enjoyment has been in faster progress in Ethiopia in recent decades (John, et al., 2019). As also declared by various international conventions and previous studies, child marriage is seen as a violation of girls' human rights in Ethiopia and limits the opportunities of girls and their children as well. For example, Woden, et al. (2017) show that most countries have adopted 18 years as the legal age for marriage for girls, and in some countries, the age is higher whereas other countries have a lower legal age for marriage.

The 2000 Ethiopian Family Code sets the minimum legal age for marriage for both boys and girls at 18 years. Nevertheless, under article 7.2 of the Ethiopian family code, it is also specified that the Minister of Justice grants a waiver of not more than

two years to future spouses or parents or guardians to marry earlier. Similarly, the African Charter on the Right and Welfare of the Child (1990) article 21 states that “Child marriage and betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective action including legislation shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years.” Besides, in October 2005 the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa and the newly adopted criminal law of Ethiopia in 2005 declare the minimum age of marriage for women to be 18 years and states that marriage shall only take place with the full agreement of both spouses.

As the founding and a member state of the UN in 1945, Ethiopia is agreed to the UN conventions and principles to protect the rights of its citizens. UN established UNICEF in 1946 and UNICEF was established in Ethiopia in 1952. Since then, UNICEF has been working to support national efforts towards the realization of children's and women's rights. Besides, UNICEF Ethiopia is directed by the Convention on the Rights of Child and strives to achieve its principles. In accordance with UNICEF legislation, the 2000 revised family code of Ethiopia improved the minimum legal marriage age for both spouses to 18 as also explained above. This shows that the country's commitment to updating its national laws towards the internationally declared principles is higher. Here, I am talking about the readiness of the country towards the theoretical adoption of international laws. When it comes to application, it is another challenge because the rights of women and children that are even written in the country's constitution are still at the theoretical level. So, the country which is reluctant to apply the constitutional rights for its citizens takes more time and effort to apply internationally declared rights for its citizens. I argue that the application of national laws paves the way for the application of internationally declared rights. Without the application of national democratic rights, thinking about the internationally set rights is unthinkable because the experience of the country towards the practice of national democratic rights for its society highly matters for the further application of internationally declared rights.

Compared to others, women's and girls' child rights that are declared in the FDRE Constitution and various international conventions are lagged behind in Ethiopia. Consistently, the study shows that even though the minimum legal age of marriage in Ethiopia is eighteen years for both spouses, it is widely ignored for girls (Nayak, 2013). The higher prevalence of girls' child marriage practice in Ethiopia is

confirmed by the recent study. For example, UNICEF (2019) reports that nowadays in Ethiopia 40% of women aged 20-24 years got married before they reached eighteen years and 14% married before they reached fifteen years.

Besides, the weak legal system, the study also shows that religious traditions, sociocultural practices, economic issues, and deep-rooted prejudices towards the female gender contributed to the practice of girls' child marriage (Boyden et al., 2013). Further study also shows that more than half of Ethiopian women (58%) were married before they reach the age of 18 years (CSA [Ethiopia] and International Census Forum (ICF, 2016). Furthermore, these sources show that about 11% of child married women are in polygamous unions, and the percentage of women who marry at their child age tends to be higher in the polygamous union as compared to monogamous unions. Moreover, the Ethiopian demographic and health survey of 2016 shows that the national prevalence of child marriage in the country was 58%. According to the report of UNICEF Ethiopia (2019), the prevalence of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia is 40 percent for women currently aged 18-24 years, 50.5% for women currently aged 25-35 years, 60 percent for women currently aged 36-49 years. This shows that the practice of girls' child marriage is decreasing from time to time. However, it needs more work to completely overcome girls' child marriage practice in Ethiopia.

#### **2.2.2.1. The National Policy on Ethiopian Women**

The Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) formulated the National Policy on Ethiopian Women in 1993. The policy depends on the existing situation of Ethiopian girls and women concerning the enjoyment of their participation in the effort towards sustainable development and human rights. The policy document shows that though Ethiopian girls and women work for long hours to sustain their family, their contribution to society has not been acknowledged. It further notes women are lacking equal opportunities and lag behind their male counterparts in all fields. Consistently, the study shows that the condition of Ethiopian women is further affected by the existing gender bias of the society, which is reflected in many forms like girls' child marriage and constraining their full development and advancement (Alemu, 2002). I argue that changing the biased deep-rooted perception of society towards girls' and women's status in Ethiopia needs a new strategy. As an Ethiopian researcher, I have

seen the weak strategy that hinders the achievement of women's empowerment and emancipation. Starting from regional to local levels, most of the professionals working in women, Children and Youth Affairs office are from other fields of studies like history, geography, and even natural sciences like Biology. They are not trained in the areas of women studies or gender studies or both. So, they are not qualified for the effective application of gender-sensitive policies and strategies.

Even if the national policy strongly shows the participation of girls and women as the core of sustainable development and the democratic process, there has been no strong and organized effort to solve the problems as I argued above. Consistently, the study notes that the efforts to improve the situation of girls and women have been fragmented and disorganized in that there was no responsible authority for the application of the designed policy. Therefore, it states, the efforts are still then are suffering from lack of coordination and duplication. The National Policy clearly shows that it depends on the principle of respect for human rights without distinction as proclaimed in the UN Charter and other international conventions to which Ethiopia is a signatory party including CEDAW (Alemu, 2002). Disdain the legal sanctions against girls married before age 18 as discussed above, and the growing consciousness among leaders and professionals that it is harmful to girls and their families and the community, families continue to assert marrying their daughters in their childhood in Ethiopia.

## Chapter Three: Research Methodology

### 3.1. Study Area Description

Ethiopia is located in the East of African region called the Horn of Africa, and Addis Ababa is the capital city of the country. Ethiopia is a large country with a land area of more than 1.1 million square kilometers. Ethiopia is considered by many to be one of the most under-developed nations in the world due to one of the highest poverty levels. However, within its African boundaries lies a nation filled with a rich heritage and culture. The country is bordered by Kenya to the South, Sudan to the West, Djibouti, and Somalia to the East and Eritrea to the North (Ababa, 2005; Pariona, 2018).



Map of Ethiopia: 2020

Ethiopia's population size rapidly increases which was about 70.3 million according to the 2007 population and Housing Census (CSA, 2007), and now 114.96 million as the population estimate of 2020 population and this ranks the country 12th in the

world and the second most populated country in Africa following Nigeria (World meter, 2020; World Population Prospects, 2020). According to the population and housing census of 2007, the age range of 15-24 years accounts for about 20.5% of the total population, and girls aged 15-24 constitute 10.3% of the total population of the country (CSA, 2007). According to the report of the 2014 Ethiopian mini demographic and health survey (DHS) 21.5% of young women aged 15-24 did not get any kind of education, 46.9% had primary education and 16.4% had secondary education. Only 41% of women aged (15-49) were literate (CSA, 2014). This notes that illiteracy is prevalent among women in general but also young girls (CSA, 2014). Agriculture is the backbone of the country and the most important means of economic activity contributing to 80% of the employment, half of the gross domestic product (GDP), and 84% of the exports. Recently, Ethiopia is one of the fastest-growing non-oil economies in the world, with an annual growth rate of 10.8% in 2017 (Kassegne, et al., 2018). The agriculture development-led industrialization (ADLI) and successive Poverty reduction (2002-2010) and growth-oriented programs (2010/11-2014/15) have contributed to rapid Economic growth. As a result, Ethiopia's GDP per-capita income has increased from 164 in 1992 to 486 in 2015, and poverty has been reduced from 44% in 2000 to 30% in 2015. This has positive implications on the education and health sectors with life expectancy, infant mortality, maternal mortality, primary school enrollment, and primary school completion rates all showing progress, leading to Ethiopia being on the way towards the achievement of the global sustainable development goals by 2030.

Women have equal rights in marriage as compared to men as prescribed by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution (FDRE, 1995). A national policy of women was announced in 1993 to institutionalize woman's political, economic, and social rights by creating opportunities that would allow woman's engagement in public offices and government institutions (Emirie, 2005). Both the penal code and Family Code have been revised in 2005 and 2000 respectively to make marriage and divorce procedures reflect gender equality and to make Female Genital Mutilation/Circumstance (FGM/C) illegal.

Ethiopia stood 129th out of 136 countries based on the Gender and Development Index and the country's ranks on the social institutions and gender index are 64th out of 86 countries. The practice of child marriage is common in most parts of Ethiopia,

though there have been reports of a decline of the practice in recent years (CSA, 2016). Recently, Ethiopia has 0.58 Gender Inequality Index (GII), ranking it 123rd out of 162 countries according to the 2018 index (HDI, 2019). In Ethiopia, women hold only 37.3 percent of parliamentary seats, and only about 11.5 percent of adult women have completed their secondary school compared to 22 percent of their male counterparts (HDI, 2019).

The population of the country has different social and cultural practices. The marriage practices of the country are legal marriage, abduction, and marriage by ‘consent’ or *Asema*. Moreover, harmful traditional practices like child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) are still practiced. In most families, child marriage which is associated with having many children is seen as prestige and the one with more family is seen as the richest and has more social acceptance. Besides, the societies of the country have their wearing style during the holy day, cultural foods like “*combo*” and porridge, and religions (Orthodox, Protestant and *Waqeffanna* and others).

I see from the above discussion that the participation of women and girls in activities that can change their lives is very low in the current situation of Ethiopia. I believe that development without gender equality is like driving the car without fuel because giving less attention to women education and lagging behind their role leads to lagging the country’s development behind. Without the equal involvement of men and women, it is impossible to see well-developed Ethiopia forever. So, it should be understood that working towards the promotion of gender equality and ending harmful traditional practices like girls' child marriage is the first step to develop the country. I argue that what is meant to be developed in the current situation of Ethiopia such as the construction of good buildings and other social services should come after the eradication or at least minimization of sociocultural barriers that undermine women and girls. If all societies get equal opportunity to develop themselves and exert their efforts to change their country, what has been said development today can easily be achieved. I believe that liberated society is patriotic and sacrifice their lives to develop their country. But, if the country is unequally treated her society, it is impossible to see development. To me, development is about liberty, equal opportunity, and equity, and then working together towards the development of one’s country. So, gender equality is a base for the development of Ethiopia and opens the way for the realization of what the country has been tried to achieve before but not. I

focus on gender equality here because I argue that gender inequality is one of the core factors that perpetuate girls' child marriage in Ethiopia. Though I am a male researcher and not experience what women and girls in Ethiopia have been really experiencing, my educational background as a gender expert somewhat helps me to understand their situation. I mean, I am very committed to research on how girls' child marriage paralyzes the life of girls and what are the root causes for the prevalence of the practices.

### **3.2. Research Approach**

Kothari (2004) explains the qualitative research approach as a kind of research that is concerned with the subjective analysis of attitudes, behaviors, and opinions. It is a research approach that needs the researcher's impressions and insights. Similarly, Teherani, et al., (2015) explain the qualitative research approach as a research approach in which the systematic inquiry of social phenomena in natural settings is employed. These phenomena can include but are not limited to, how individuals and/or groups behave, how women experience aspects of their lives like child marriage, how organizations function, and how interactions shape relationships. Moreover, in the qualitative research approach, the researcher examines why events happen, and what those events mean to the participants studied. In line with this, I employed the qualitative research approach to explore the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia

### **3.3. Sources of Data**

Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in this study. Primary data are collected for the specific problem at hand, using procedures that fit the research problem best (Hox and Boeije, 2005). For this study, the primary data were collected from the women informants and key informants (UNICEF Ethiopia, Save the Children Ethiopia and Women and Child Affairs Ethiopia). Secondary data means data that have already been collected for some other purpose and is very useful for one's research purpose (Allen, 2017). Accordingly, secondary data were collected through critical reviews of books, journal articles, reports, and newspapers for this study.



### **3.4. Data collection methods**

Data collection is one of the most significant steps in the research project (Bryman, 2016). It is the process of gathering and analyzing information on variables of interest, in an established systematic manner that enables the researcher to answer the stated research questions (Kabir, 2016). In this study, the triangulation of qualitative methods of data collection, that is, in-depth Interview, Focused Group Discussion (FGD), and case study was used to overcome the limitation of a single method. Data triangulation has been used to maximize the validity and reliability of data. Therefore, I employed these data collection instruments to answer the research questions.

#### **3.4.1. In-depth Interview**

From the social scientific perspective, the interview is one of the data collection methods that involve two or more people exchanging information through a series of questions and answers (Blackstone, 2012). The interview is the most important way to collect detailed information. It has an advantage over surveys because with a survey if a participant's response sparks some follow-up questions in your mind, we generally do not have a chance to ask for more detailed information. On the contrary, an interview helps us to talk with participants, and we can ask them the follow-up questions (Blackstone, 2012). Besides, this technique permits the collection of detailed and subjective information from informants. Purposely, ten women interviewees were selected for an in-depth interview.

I chose to conduct the individual interviews as one of the data collection methods to answer my research questions because some informants may be reluctant to speak out in a group, whereas they could discuss very well when they were anonymous. Accordingly, during the in-depth interview questions about the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage were addressed with each informant.

I recruited the interview participants with the help of Women, Children, and Youth affairs office managers located in different parts of Ethiopia. First, I met them and showed them the letter confirming I was the researcher and had permission for data collection. Then, I took the time to discuss with them the purpose of my study, and they were very welcoming and helped me to select the potential and volunteering women for the interview in their respective locations. Though I am a male researcher

and all the interview participants were females, I tried my best to make the interview effective. Since I and my informants were from the Ethiopian society, this helped me more to understand their argument and elaborate on the issue that they were asked. To avoid any tension and fear, I took time and explained to them in detail the purpose of my research and explained that my study would not affect their security. I finally won their attention, and they agreed to sit for interviews. Moreover, to avoid any fear and doubt and to make the interview more effective, we agreed to sign the consent form where it was declared that I would keep their confidentiality and anonymity. To do so, I used their nicknames in my research to directly quote their testimonies and discuss the interview results. It is impossible to say that my positionality as a male researcher did not affect issues that the women informants should discuss but as a researcher, I used the above measures to make the data collection ethically responsive and transparent.

The interviews took place at different places depending on the interest of the informants. Since the majority of the informants were house-wives, they preferred to sit for an interview around their home whereas the two informants who were government employees chose to be interviewed at their office. The time used for the interview was between 45 and 60 minutes for each interviewee. During the interview, I took the note from the discussion of each of the interviewee in addition to the audio recording. The following table shows the background characteristics of informants:

S/n	Nicknames	sex	Age at first marriage in years	Current age in Years	Educational status	Job
1	Hadas	F	17	24	First Degree	Government employee
2	Galane	F	12	21	No educational background	Housewife
3	Mintewab	F	13	23	No educational Background	Housewife
4	Bilise	F	13	20	No educational background	Housewife

5	Bontu	F	16	23	Diploma	Government employee
6	Tsegereda	F	13	24	Grade 6	Daily labourer
7	Kulani	F	12	23	Grade 4	Housewife
8	Kebebech	F	15	22	Grade 3	Housewife
9	Samira	F	15	21	Grade 5	Housewife
10	Zayituna	F	15	24	No educational background	Housewife

Source: Field Survey, 2020

### 3.4.2. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a qualitative research method and data collection technique in which a selected group of people discuss a given topic or issue in detail which is facilitated by a professional, who is an external moderator. This method enables to solicit discussants' perceptions, attitudes, experiences, knowledge, and practices about the issue under study with the interaction with different people. The method is based upon the principle that the group processes activated during an FGD help to clarify and identify shared knowledge among groups and communities (Van Eeuwijk and Angehrn, 2017). To do so, two FGDs (each containing seven members) were conducted with women discussants. Discussants were selected purposely to discuss the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage. I believed that focus group discussions could give the opportunity for discussants to share their experiences with their peers, ask, and discussed the relevant questions. Therefore, the data from the focus group discussants gave me a wealth of detailed information and deep insights. So, I found it was very important to answer the research questions in addition to the in-depth interview and case study. Accordingly, focused group discussants were discussed the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia.

Focused Group Discussants were from Western Ethiopia, particularly Jimma Geneti District. I recruited Focused Group Discussants with the help of the manager of one of

the kebeles of Jimma Geneti called Gamo Nagaro. Therefore, these all women discussants (FGD groups) were from the Western Oromia region of Ethiopia, particularly Jimma Geneti District, Gamao Nagaro kebele, and have *Idir* together on the 21st of each month according to the Ethiopian calendar. *Idir* is a community-based organization in which these women and others are organized and discuss their social life, administration issue and deposit money to boost their economic status. Though the members of the *Idir* were about 30 members, I selected only fourteen women for discussion to easily facilitate the discussion within my time frame. Accordingly, I have grouped them in two, each having seven members. The time used for each group for the discussion was between 60 and 90 minutes. During the discussion, I have recorded the discussion and used it later for analysis.

### **3.4.3. Case study**

The case study is one of the qualitative data collection methods which is particularly used to employ when there is a need to obtain an in-depth understanding of an issue, event, or phenomenon of interest, in its natural real-life context (Crowe, et al., 2011). To do so, three women were selected purposely for a case study to answer the research questions. Accordingly, issues about the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage were studied on each individual.

When I prepared to conduct qualitative data, I expected that my position as a male researcher would require me to make special efforts to communicate with women informants. My expectation was based on the fear that the gender difference between me and the informants might highly affect our interactions and communications. However, my preconceived expectation about the role of my positionality as a male researcher was not as much as I feared because women effectively discussed the problem. Despite my gender difference from the participants, I was still an insider and part of the social contexts that I studied. Like my informants, I shared a common attitude towards girls' child marriage practice. Even though I was a male feminist researcher who researched from women's perspective, I shared that girls' child marriage is a bad social practice and has been working towards the eradication of this harmful traditional practice. Donna Haraway (1988) in her work 'Situated knowledge' notes that researcher positionality is the most important practice in grounding knowledge organized around the imagery of vision and most of the scientific

discourse is organized in this manner. So, I called myself a feminist researcher because my goal was/is/will to produce feminist researches, though my gender identity. I had conducted two research projects about women when I did my Bachelor of Arts in Gender and Development, and Master of Arts in Sociology. This study was the third research I had conducted about women. In addition to conducting researches about women, I have committed to work towards the emancipation of women.

I introduced my position, as explained above, to the informants before I had started data collection. I preferred to introduce my position in detail because I expected that my participants feared to discuss their feelings and life experiences with someone who was a stranger of a different gender, and the one they believed as the supporter of patriarchy. In addition to my effort, the role of Women, Children, and Youth Affairs Managers at different locations and the manager of Gamo Negaro kebele was also important because they had familiarity with the informants and introduced me very well to the informants. I mean, they were well-informed about my positionality because as I discussed above, I met them before I was meeting the informants and discussed in detail my study, background, and positionality. The case study informants were the women who knew me and I knew them as well before and contact with them was made without the help of others. Therefore, the participants for the interviews, focused group discussions and case study were openly discussed the root causes of girls' child marriage and its consequences on the life statuses of girls who were entered into marriage at childhood without the influence of my positionality. Though I thought I collected the data needed from informants, I did not mean that the gender difference between me and my informants somehow influences the data that should be collected. During the fieldwork, I remember when women wanted some issues to discuss in detail but fear to say, for example, issues related to sexuality. During this time, I tried my best to help them by speaking first the issues they wanted to say. I mean, in some cases, I understood what they wanted to speak but fear to speak about. I did not mean, I totally understood their feelings before they spoke, but only to tell the measures I used to try to help them freely speak. I agree that the willingness and comfort that female participants want to discuss with a male researcher about such sensitive issues is not without limitation.

### **3.5. Sampling Techniques**

As indicated above, participants in the FGD, in-depth interview, and case study were selected using non-probability sampling called purposive sampling technique. The sample is heterogeneous in that it includes a group of participants with different educational background, marital status, age, and place of origin in Ethiopia. Informants with different places of origin in Ethiopia were included in order to consider the testimony of various participants in the different regions. There was no informant that had homosexuality background and married to same-sex. Therefore, all the informants had a heterosexual background. Same-sex marriage and homosexuality are illegal and therefore, not allowed in Ethiopia. Under Article 629 of the Criminal Code, same-sex marriage and homosexual activity is criminalized in Ethiopia.

### **3.6. Methods of Data Analysis**

Data analysis is about reducing data which means it is about reducing the large body of information that the researcher has gathered so that the researcher can make a sense of it (Bryman, 2016). First, the questions for data collection were prepared in the English language and translated to *Afan Oromo* and Amharic languages before data collection. Hence, the interviews, focus group discussions and case study were conducted in the local languages, *Afan Oromo* and Amharic, and later translated to the English language. During the translation, the longer interviews were condensed without losing their original meaning. Interviews were summarized with contact summary forms. A contact summary is a sheet or form that summarizes interview questions and the responses obtained in a particular interviewee. It is a qualitative data analysis tool where the researcher makes a preliminary summary of an interview before going to the next interview so that what might be missed in one encounter will be gained in the next interview. After each interview, I have summarized the previous interview on a contact summary in the local languages (*Afan Oromo* and Amharic) before going to the next interview.

During the interviews, some informants had a small child and the situation was not comfortable for the discussion. For example, Tsegereda had a small child and the child was not happy when he saw someone he never knew with his mother. But, she told her child that he should play with other children until the discussion would be finished. I mean, the way she understood the situation and made the environment

welcoming for the interview was amazing. Hadas and Bontu, who were the government employees, discussed that they wanted to work with me in the future concerning the eradication of harmful traditional practices including girls' child marriage. After the discussion with participants, I understood that they were kindly created a good environment for discussion, and I had learned many things from their discussions.

Coding the collected data is a very important activity before starting the extensive data analysis. I understand coding as the transitional process between data collection and a more extensive analysis of the collected data. Accordingly, I used Nvivo version 12 software to code the collected data. Then, the data coded were transcribed and categorized into themes. As also discussed by Kawulich (2004), identifying themes is not sufficient to start data analysis. Besides, understanding the exact words and situations of participants and deep understanding of the phenomena under study with the story emerging from the words of participants and from the contexts in which they occur is also very important. It should also be combined with the intuitive ideas and creativity of the researcher. Finally, qualitative data were analyzed by using the discourse analysis method and presented by using narration, description and explanation.

## **Chapter Four: The Root Causes of Girls Child Marriage in Ethiopia**

This chapter deals with the results and discussions of the root causes of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia.

Child marriage continues to be a problem for many girls in Ethiopia because of various causes. Though Ethiopia adopts various international human rights conventions and various national policies to protect the rights of people, child marriage which violates the rights of girls' human rights have been continued in the country. Most of the extensive body of literature also argue that child marriage is still practiced in Ethiopia due to various reasons including socioeconomic factors such as poverty, lack of education, and cultural factors as well as social norms and traditions (UNICEF, 2014; Malhotra, 2010; Birech, 2013; Bezie and Addisu, 2019; Mengistu, 2017). The interaction of economics, social norms, familial motivations, and patriarchal social structures are also seen as the reasons behind the practice of child marriage in Ethiopia (Jones, et al., 2014). It should be noted that these factors or their interaction lead to girls' lower social statuses, and gender inequality. These deep-rooted sociocultural systems, in turn, preserve patriarchal structures where women are passive and assigned lower life status and men are controlling the highest share of the decision-making power and economic benefits these directly or indirectly normalize the practice of child marriage in the society.

The stronger patriarchal system in the country also minimizes the social value of educating girls and at the same time justifying the perceptions that girls are an economic burden and sources of poverty to their parents. This perception is strong when patriarchal norms are powerfully defined femininity in terms of doing indoor activities like motherhood, reproductive roles and other care-giving duties rather than encouraging them to get the opportunity to attend school, economically empowered and develop their skill to participate in decision-making at the family level and beyond. This situation creates the fertile ground for the marriage of younger girls and as they are forced to become a servitude to their husbands and their husbands' households throughout their lifetime.

Based on the review of the literature and the information gathered from informants and discussants, the following are identified as the root causes of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia. Some factors are simultaneously become the root causes and the



consequences of girls' child marriage. For example, poverty, illiteracy, or lower educational status, and gender inequality are identified as the root causes and consequences of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia. Some of these factors are also interrelated and one is causing the other. For example, social norms, gender inequality, and lower educational status lead to poverty. Many of these factors are interdependent and cannot separate from each other and cause child marriage as acceptable harmful traditional practice in most parts of the country.

#### **4.1. Poverty**

There is a misunderstanding about how poverty causes child marriage in most cases. Particularly previous studies in Ethiopia focus only on the economic dimensions of poverty as the cause of child marriage. However, I understand poverty as it is not only lacking economic needs but also it includes a lack of social and political elements. The poor economic and social statuses and lower political awareness in the country in general and among most rural families, in particular, leads to child marriage. Moreover, the results of qualitative data for this study show child marriage practice is perpetuated because of economic, social, and political poverty. For example, the result of the key informant interview with the manager of women, Children, and Youth Affairs office from Jimma Genati district, which is located in Western Ethiopia, shows that in addition to poor economic status, poor social status and lack of understanding about political issues like human rights, particularly gender equality, perpetuates child marriage in the rural parts of the region. She further told that if the family understands child marriage as the violation of girls' human rights the prevalence of child marriage can be minimized.

Further, studies also show that child marriage practice is higher in the poorest countries like Ethiopia and the prevalence of the practice is even higher among rural and poor families (ICRW, 2006; Malhotra, 2010; Nayak, 2013). This implies that the poor parents in Ethiopia are forced their girls' children to marry off in order to get the economic benefit. Where there is acute poverty, a young girl may be seen as an economic burden for the family, and therefore the family should be married off her either to get an economic benefit from the groom's family or to be free from supporting their girl child. Both aspects are caused due to the poor economic status of parents. To fill this gap, many poor families married off their daughters at an early

age basically as a means for economic survival; it means the cost of education, food, and cloth for the married off a daughter is reduced for family and the family also gets the economic advantage in exchange for their daughter.

It is also argued that poverty is related to culture to a certain degree. This is due to the fact that some people in Ethiopia do not like to work hard rather they have cultivated the spirit of dependence. Hence, marriage is considered a transaction, a significant source of economic advantage for these people because they get more stocks and money from the bride-wealth and use it as the best alternative to improve their economic status. In the context of Poverty, therefore, this practice encourages child marriage. This situation also affects the education of girls because parents prefer to marry off their daughters and get wealth than educating them. This is similar to another finding. For example, Birech (2013) notes that most poor families in Ethiopia are married off their daughters at an early age and used it as a source of wealth. Similarly, a woman from Focused Group discussion explained as she dropped her school from grade four and married by the decision of her family because her family had only a single ox. Therefore, they had to get the money to buy another ox to farm their lands and feed their other five sons. To do so, they made the option to married off her and got money from the groom's family. Similarly, case one explained as she was forced to marry because of the poor status of her family as follows:

*My name is Banchirga Shifarew. My families are poor farmers and sell me for their economic advantage. They received cows, horses, and money from my husband's family to marry me to him. As I married, I was forced to have sex with my husband and lost my virginity. At the time I did not have sexual desire because I was a child and hungry girl. However, the life of my family was improved after they got good benefits once they sold me in the name of marriage.*

Likewise, among the ten women interviewees, seven of them (70%) explained that their parents' poor life status forced them to marry off at their childhood. Out of them, three were born from parents that did not have sufficient basic needs for survival, like shelter and food whereas two of them were orphans. Another two lost their fathers by death and grew by the help of their mothers. Therefore, all these participants were from a poor family and the poor situation of their family forced them to marry at a

child age. These poorer living standards deprived girls of child marriage which are followed by other complicated risks like marital rape.

The result of the interview also shows that girls suffer a lot because of poverty that forced them to enter into marriage at child age and this is followed by having many children and raising them in the situation of poverty. Tsegereda, one of the interviewees, further told as her marriage at an early age due to the poor status of her parents affects her children as well. She told if she was not married at childhood, she would be mature in making her own choices, and she would not suffer in raising children in her childhood. Currently, she is a widow and has four children. Last September (2019), she explained as it was her 3rd son's birthday, and she encountered a financial problem to celebrate her child's birthday, and she was hopeless on that day, and she borrowed from neighbor 100 birr, and she bought candles and dry bread and celebrated his birthday. She stated as this would not happen if she was born from a rich and educated family and get married after completing her schooling and getting her own job.

#### **4.2. Illiteracy or lower educational status of parents and girls**

In addition to poverty, child marriage is practiced in Ethiopia due to the lower educational status of parents and also girls. Illiterate and society with lower educated status are highly influenced by the preexisting sociocultural values and have a negative perception towards educating girls. In Ethiopia marriage is often seen as an option for girls who are uneducated or less educated because they do not have any options for the future. Besides, the educational status of a family highly affects whether child marriage is acceptable or not. Similarly, the previous study shows that illiterate and less educated families are less likely than educated families to be aware of the negative impacts of child marriage and laws prohibiting child marriage (Mengistu, 2017; Wodon, et al., 2017). Lack of education also limits the opportunity for girls to decide who and when to marry. As a result, girls are forced to enter into child marriage and after they enter into marriage, they will not be able to bargain in matters that affect their lives and that of their family due to lack of empowerment.

It is arguable that girls who are educated beyond primary school are a reliable way to economic empowerment and sustainable changes in the status quo, as well as determinants of good family's health and nutrition. Therefore, there is a direct

relationship between girls' education, marriage, and fertility rate. Girls who are educated beyond ten or more years of school are expected to marry later and have lower fertility; improved infant survival reduced maternal death and enhanced levels of infant and child development and educational attainment.

Malhotra (2010) and Focus Group Discussion results also show that the opportunity of girls who attend low or no schooling are most probably forced to enter into child marriage and most likely to have a large number of children. More than half of Focused Group Discussants did not attend any formal school and could not read and write. The discussants who attended formal education told that they were quit their schooling and get married at an early age because in their culture girls attend school only to know how to sign and write their names.

Even getting the minimal opportunity to attend formal schooling is very tough for many girls due to the low value attached to girls' education. They further explained that the *Oromo* proverb, “*dubartiin barattee eessa geessi yoo herumte ilma deessi*”, which means it is not important to educate girls rather it is better for girls to marry off, and they will give birth to a son, is still powerful and paralyze the educational opportunity for girls.

These strong socio-cultural values are given less of a priority for educating girls. This is also associated with a perceived woman's most important role to be that of a wife, mother, and/or homemaker. Moreover, as data from Save the Children office (2019) in Addis Ababa shows educating girls and preparing them for the jobs has given little attention in most poor families. Because rather than sending their daughters to school, poor families prefer to marry off their daughters. Moreover, the lack of availability of nearby schools forced girls to stop their education at the primary level. It is culturally forbidden for girls to go far from their family's home, and since secondary schools are far from most rural girls it is mandatory for them to drop their education and enter into marriage at an early age.

The manager of women, Children, and Youth Affairs office from Amhara regional state of East Gojjam Zone explains that some families are also unable to pay school fees for their children. She further explains as the family who has many children cannot pay for the educational services of all of their children, and they have decided to educate their sons and learned to stay their daughters at home as they help them

until they reach at least twelve years. Then they married off their daughters and get bride-wealth in exchange. Similarly, Wodon, et al. (2017) has found as the capacity of most rural parents in Ethiopia makes it hard to send all their children to school. Due to the existing gender norms and the prevalence of illiteracy, the families are encouraged to invest from their lower-income on educating their sons than daughters. Consequently, most girls are denied to be registered for school or dropped their schooling and enter into marriage at an early age without their consent and maturity. Moreover, the study shows that lack of formal employment opportunities for young women in Ethiopia means that secondary education for women is less accessible, therefore, families are reluctant to spend for girls' education (Bezie and Addisu, 2019).

Lack of available secondary school and employment opportunities for rural girls also indirectly contributed to child marriage. In most rural parts of Ethiopia, girls have fewer opportunities to access secondary school and as a result, their employment opportunities outside of marriage are very low. Therefore, weak social and economic choices forced girls to accept child marriage. This is similar to another finding, for example, Nanda et, al. (2015) notes that most rural girls are always less accessible to secondary schools because of lack or/and cost of transportation and cultural barriers. Secondary schools are not available almost in all rural Ethiopia so that students must move to towns to attend secondary schools. This situation makes it very difficult for most rural girls to continue their secondary educations by transiting through new villages and towns, and most parents are also not allowed their daughters to go far from their home due to the existing cultural constraint.

Structural weaknesses in the educational provision system also play a great role in perpetuating child marriage practice in Ethiopia. Most primary schools in rural Ethiopia do not give special support for girls' educational achievement. The entanglement of the weak educational system and other social institutions forced girls to drop their education at primary school. Once they quit their education at primary level girls are forced to marry at their younger age because they do not have another option. In line with this, Samira, one of the woman interviewees, explained as:

*I have quit my education from grade five because the school was about three hours far from my village. I was attended from grade one to four at school which was in my*

*village. There was no transportation service from my village to the small town where grade five to eight was available. Therefore, I mostly came to school late and my teachers warned me to come to school on time. But, due to the distance, I could not come to school on time. Even though I told my teachers and my school director my problem, they never helped me. They told me as I have to bring my family and if not, I must drop my schooling. Therefore, I went to my family and told them the situation and requested as they would go to school with me and told the problem to my school teachers and director. Unfortunately, my family refused to help me and told me as I had to quit my education. Finally, I dropped my schooling because I did not have another option than dropping my schooling. Two years later, when I was fifteen, I was married off to someone whom I did not love by only the choice of my family.*

From this, we understand that how much weak school system and lower attitude of the family towards girls' education paralyzes the educational opportunities of girls. On the other hand, it implies the opportunity of girls who quit their schooling is marriage.

The further finding shows that lower educational attainment for girls leads to lower knowledge and understanding which affects their marriage age and the ability to decide their own life before marriage and in marriage (Bezie and Adisu, 2019). This means, if their educational achievement is higher, they will get knowledge and understanding and can challenge their parents not to enter into child marriage. Moreover, the role of parents in the continuity of child marriage is most often related to their educational status. This implies that parents with higher educational status have a good understanding of the negative impacts of child marriage whereas illiterate or low educated parents perceive it as a good social practice.

### **4.3. Bride-wealth and virginity**

Bride-wealth is a gift given to the bride's family by the groom or his parents for marrying their daughter. Birech (2013) also explains the bride-wealth as it is a source of wealth and prestige that is given in the form of money and livestock such as cattle, mule, horse, goats, and sheep among others. The study also shows that even though there are considerable regional differences in how the bride-wealth contributes to child marriage in Ethiopia, it is highest in Pastoralist areas (Boyden et al., 2013). In

most cases, the payment for the bride decreases as the girl gets older. That means, the age of the bride highly determines whether the payment is higher or lower.

The age of the bride is also related to virginity. Virginity is valued and seen as very important in Ethiopia. Therefore, girls are expected to be virgins until marriage. For parents to get the best bride-wealth, the girls must be young and virgin. Age and virginity are highly related because as long as girls get older the probability of missing their virginity is higher. So, parents must marry off their daughter as young as possible in order to get a good bride-wealth. Similarly, Birech (2013) and UNICEF (2010) have found that bride-wealth and virginity are highly valued and encouraged in Ethiopia. To get these advantages, parents have to marry off their daughters before they lost their virgins regardless of their ages and the associated impacts on their future life.

According to the information from, Zayituna, the woman interviewee from the Afar Region of Ethiopia, the sexual organ of girls must be sewed until they enter into marriage. The main reason for this harmful practice is to protect girls' virginity which will help parents to get good respect from their neighbor and groom's family and relatives. This also increases the amount of wealth collected. Moreover, the age difference between brides and grooms must be at least five years. In her case, she explained:

*My sexual organ was sewed after I was circumcised when I was five years old. Only the small hole of my sexual organ was left for urine after my body was sewed. I stayed in this situation until I was 13 years old. And then it was removed from my sexual organ a year prior to my marriage time. In the following year, I was married to a man who was 22 years old because in our culture the age difference between the bride and the groom should be at least five years.*

As Zayituna further explained, her parents were successfully got wealth in exchange for her because she was a virgin married and fulfilled the cultural requirements of “good marriage practice” in her community. Similarly, various studies show that there is a greater age difference between girls’ child brides and their husbands than women who marry after the legal age of marriage (Erulkar, 2013; Jensen and Thornton, 2003; John, et al., 2019).



The age difference between couples can further intensify women's subordination within the marriages and limit their freedom of decision-making ability. Moreover, it leads to sexual incompatibility between couples and this will lead to divorce. After divorce, it is the responsibility of single mothers to help their children because most children choose to live with their mothers than fathers. According to the information from the Women, Children, and Youth Affairs Manager of Eastern Oromia region of Western Hararghe Zone, there is the highest rate of divorce which will indirectly increase the number of single mothers and the main reason is sexual incompatibility and polygamy marriage. She further explained as the age difference between couples is higher and consequently, they have not happy marriage life and this is the main reason for divorce among many families. In addition to the age difference, there is a situation in which some men have more than one wife and this situation also increases the rate of divorce in the zone. We have to understand that child marriage which is driven by the culture of bride-wealth and virginity is leads to sexual incompatibility and thus indirectly contributed to divorce, and all these situations may worsen the problem of women because they are taking the responsibility of supporting children without enough sources of income and within the existing socio-cultural constraints. Child married women who are uneducated and do not know about the legal procedures hardly get what they have to get from divorce. Even some may fear going to court to request their properties and finally left their property and enter into the sea of poverty. It is a kind of vicious circle because these single mothers are also married off their daughters at an early age in order to get the bride-wealth and to change their difficult economic circumstances.

Among the ten interviewees, 3(30%) of them explained that the reason for their marriage at childhood is due to the fear of family as their daughters may lose their virginity if they stay longer before marriage. Driving donkey in some cultures in Ethiopia is the manifestation of shame and exclusion. Therefore, girls who lost their virginity before marriage are lost acceptance and respect from their own parents, their spouse, and their own relatives and spouses' parents as well. They told that a girl who lost her virginity before marriage is forced to back to her family by driving donkey and great insults. Moreover, discussants explained that bride-wealth and virginity play important factors that are perpetuating child marriage and the life of girls who lost their virginity outside of marriage exposed to difficult insults and lack protection from



their family and community. In order to avoid the problem associated with virginity and bride-wealth, most families are forced their girls' children to married off before they are matured and ready enough for legal marriage age. As case three also told that to preserve her virginity, she was married off by the decision of her parents, mainly her father when she was twelve years old:

*My name is Tumuri Gudina. I have four children. If I was not married at my child age, the possibility of losing my virginity and bringing shame on me, my parents, and kinship were very high because I went a long distance to collect firewood. I remember as boys were tried to rape me more than two times before marriage. I was shouted and God saved me from these guys.*

The case of this participant implies that even if she was saved from the rape before marriage, she has adapted rape in marriage as part of her life. One can imagine that the child who entered into marriage at twelve years old is not matured for sexual activity and have a happy sexual life. I asked the informant about rape in marriage, but she told as she did not know about rape in marriage. She told as once the girl enters into a marriage it is her duty to satisfy the sexual need of her husband. She also told as it is a shame for a wife to discuss sexuality with her husband.

#### **4.4. Family Honor**

Family honor is a concept involving the perceived quality of worthiness and respectability that affects the social standing and the self-evaluation of the family (Bruce, 2011). There is a strong belief that the community gives high values for the respectability of family in Ethiopia and therefore, the families are viewed as a source of honor. The conduct of family members, particularly girls children, highly influences the family honor. Therefore, it is crucial for the members of the family, mainly girls, to fulfill what family and society are expected from them to get acceptance from their family and society in general. In most rural Ethiopia, maintaining family honor is accepted as more significant than both girls' freedom and achievement. And this culture forced girls to respect and accept whatever their parents order them. Accordingly, marrying off girls' children with virginity and "good discipline" is one of the many factors that is protecting their family honor. So that girls do not have any option than accepting child marriage and keeping the respectability of their families.

As discussed in section 4.3 above, virginity is very important for the bride's parents to get good bride-wealth. At the same time, it has also a great value for the protection of family honor. Because of socio-cultural and religious beliefs, a girl's virginity and sexual morality have a direct linkage to the honor and status of a parent or kinship in Ethiopia. This means the need for honor and fear of the risks of sexual conduct for girls before marriage has enormous pressure on families to marry off their daughters at an early age. If the girl lost her virginity and has sexual intercourse without marriage, it will bring shame and marginalization to the parent and kinship, therefore, child marriage is accepted as a way to protect girls' sexuality and preserving family honor. Similarly, Focused Group Discussants explained that family honor is one of the many factors that forced girls to marry at child age. Besides, the study shows that the value attached to girl's virginity is very strong for the respect and acceptance of parents and girls who lost their virginity outside of the marriage bring dishonor and disrespect to their parents and even their relatives (Jenson and Thornton, 2005; Mengistu, 2017). So, to avoid the fear of dishonor and disrespect parents should have to marry off their daughters in childhood. This shows that parents give more attention to their status and respect than the future life of their daughters.

#### **4.5. Gender inequality**

Gender equality seems to be one of the least understood issues in Ethiopia. Most people in Ethiopia understand gender difference as something natural and never changed in time and place. This unchanged gender difference roles and activities assigned to girls highly limit their future opportunities. For example, the socially defined role of girls is mostly related to indoor activities that are limiting their opportunities to engage in outdoor activities like attending school and to engage in income-generating activities. This situation increases the sense of dependency and discrimination for girls. So, they are not empowered to deny and strongly oppose the culture that encourages child marriage. So, the preexisting culture that supports being a wife and mother at childhood continues among the generations. Similarly, Birech (2013) and Balcha (2009) state as gender inequality is closely related to the belief that women are of low status as compared to men in Ethiopia. Therefore, the lower status of women in society plays a major role in perpetuating child marriage practice because women are seen as inferior, and therefore, they are undermined and subaltern (World Youth Report, 2003). In most cases, mothers also

support child marriage practices and this makes the situation very complex. They are dominated by deep-rooted practices and teach their daughters as they accept what they have accepted as parts of their life.

Girls are also learned to accept their low status, treated as unequal, and are not encouraged to participate in societal issues which also builds their capacity for decision-making. As also explained by Blomgren (2013), this situation forced girls to accept child marriage, which is one of the most destructive demonstrations of power imbalance and gender inequality between women and men. Consequently, girls endure early marriage, sexual discomfort, and violence because discriminatory gender norms prevent them from considering the possibility of a different life.

As data from UNICEF Ethiopia (2019) shows gender inequality and unbalanced power relations between men and women are the root causes of violence against women in the country. This is caused by the persistence of patriarchal attitudes towards women and stereotypical views regarding their roles and responsibilities. According to the same source, child marriage, which is among the traditional practices in Ethiopia and the broader pattern of gender discrimination, is also the consequence of gender inequality. In line with this, case two explained the way the impact of gender inequality forced her to marry at child age and also affects her future dreams as follows:

*My name is Mastawot Tolu. As a child, I had a big dream about working in a big organization, being a leader, building a very big house. That was my dream, but what hindered my dream is gender inequality which also leads me to marry at childhood. It was these old and traditional cultures that abort my dream. I stood first in my class from grade one to grade seven. But I was forced to marry my teacher from grade seven. I quit my education for four years. I started to attend my education after I gave birth to two children. But I could not study as before because I was busy with in-door activities and caring for my children. Therefore, I lost my rank and stood 20th out of 40 students. I completed grade ten and did not get a pass mark to attend a Preparatory school. And I get the opportunity to attend diploma education. I have been teaching for four years. But we have four children and our income status is very low. We do not have our own home. My plan of becoming a leader is aborted, and I am living a poor status of life because of child marriage and gender inequality in my*

*community. My brothers attended their education and nowadays they are working in good organizations and living a better standard of life.*

From the case of Mastawot above, it is clearly understandable how much the deep-rooted gender inequality and existing discrimination perpetuates child marriage that paralyzes the opportunity of girls. It is also imagined as the informant would be a leader and could live the best standard of life as she was planned unless she did inter into child marriage.

#### **4.6. Socio-cultural norms and religious laws**

A strong and deep-rooted traditional, cultural, social norms and religious laws create the fertile ground for child marriage practice in Ethiopia. Sociocultural norms and religious laws are stronger than legal issues in traditional based society like Ethiopia because society gives more attention and respect to the former than the latter. Sociocultural norms often determine the dynamics of social change in society. In Ethiopia, the differential impact of socio-cultural norms on the lives of women and men remains a major and significant concern. Ethiopia is one of the highly patriarchal societies in the world. Even though strong FDRE constitutions commitments to gender equality, social norms reinforce child marriage which also worsens violence against girls' children. It is also discussed by Mengistu (2017) as socio-cultural norms and religious laws are strongly supporting child marriage practice in Ethiopia. This implies that norms and religious laws play a pivotal role in making child marriage as normal and acceptable marriage practices among society even though the Ethiopian Family law completely prohibits child marriage practice.

More than half of Focused Group discussants, eight out of fourteen (57.14 percent), did not have any educational background and opine that child marriage is a good and socially acceptable norm that should also exist. They explain that girls should marry a virgin and have more children to get more blessings from God and older people. Besides, they explained as the family who has more girls will also have more in-laws and social acceptance in their culture. However, the remaining six Focused Group Discussants (42.85 percent) explained as the norm that supports child marriage is harmful that should be ceased. These discussants that have negative attitudes towards child marriage have an educational background or their husbands have an educational background.

From the background of the above discussants, I understand as families with good educational backgrounds feel that child marriage is a bad social practice whereas illiterate or low educated families still support child marriage as a good social norm. Mostly in rural Ethiopia, a girl should get married as early as possible as it is the most important option she has within her community. A girl should get married at an early age by fulfilling the socio-cultural norm and religious laws of the community, unless she may not get married at all. In case she married without fulfilling the socio-cultural norms of the community and also at an older age, she may face many insults and lost respect from her husband, her husband's family, and her community at all. Besides, she is seen as cursed and the one who is born from a bad family. Therefore, child marriage is a long-lived tradition, and getting married as early as possible is the only available option for a girl to lead a “better life” in her future. Similarly, the previous study shows that, for example, in the Amhara regional state of Ethiopia girls often engaged at a very young age and given to the in-laws to raise her to secure that they instill in her “values of a good wife” for their son (Bezie and Addisu, 2019). One of the child married interviewee, Mintewab, told that she married the one she was thought her brother because she was raised with him:

*Since I was raised with him and his family, I thought my husband as my brother, but I was told later as he was my husband. Both of our family told me to live with him in his house when I was 13 years old and my menstruation started. Then, I felt very sad because in our culture the marriage between brother and sister (siblings) was seen as a curse. But I learned later as he was not my brother rather my husband. When I grew and understood this kind of marriage, I hated my community and hated my gender of being a woman.*

The case of this participant shows the objective of maintaining the family's good name and social standing is a major motive because the girls' future fate depends on a “good marriage”. Choosing once own marriage partner and deciding when to marry is completely taken away from girls and given to parents in the name of the good social norm. Parents need to marry their daughter by calculating their own benefits and criteria than giving any attention to the health and future life of her.

Most rural society in Ethiopia marries off their daughters at a young age according to the socio-cultural and religious laws in which parents, most often fathers, decide when

and whom their daughters have to marry. In line with this, Galane, one of the interviewees, explains as:

*I was married before knowing the meaning of marriage when I was 12 years old. My future fate, when and whom I was married was decided by my father. Even though I had no interest in getting married at the time, my decision was refused and not heard. My father agreed with my husband's father and forced me to marry off only for the benefit of cultural satisfaction and religious reason. In our culture parents get satisfaction and respect if they marry off their daughters when she is young and does not start sexual activity. Besides, they are very happy when they prepare a marriage feast. In our culture, girls would not have been able to refuse marriage because they have to accept their parents' will. They should not disobey their order because of socio-cultural and religious reasons.*

The case of the above participant shows that socio-cultural norms and religious laws prohibit girls from becoming sexually active before marriage. To do so, parents take different measures. Female genital mutilation can be the best example. In Ethiopia, Female genital mutilation is culturally accepted as a way to cut off part of the sexual organ of girls in order to deactivate their sexual desire. The second measure is marrying off girls at an early age because if girls have well matured and gone away from the control of their families the possibility of having sexual intercourse before marriage is high. Therefore, most parents, particularly those who have no or lower educational background are forced to marry off their daughters as early as possible in an effort to prevent girls from any kind of sexual activity before marriage. A girl who does so brings dishonor to her family and community. To have sexual intercourse before marriage is seen as adultery and religiously forbidden. Parents also fear that if they do not marry off their daughters according to religious laws and social expectations, they will not be able to marry them at all. This implies that girls are most likely have to marry off at their childhood age because parents prefer not to take the risk of their daughters once they are become sexually active outside of marriage and start sexual activity.

The results of the root causes of girls' child marriage which is discussed in this chapter are similar to the theory of a social norm perspective on child marriage which is written by Bicchieri, Jiang, and Lindemans (2014). This theory concludes that

marriage is not primarily targeted to make spouses happy rather it is an instrument to bring families closer together. Similarly, as discussed in this chapter, the main motive for child marriage is targeted to get material and other advantages in exchange for girls' children than creating a happy life for them. The other statement made by this theory is why to educate girls. It declares as parents are too poor to pay for the girl's upbringing, and marriage means one less mouth to feed. Moreover, there are no decent schools in neighborhoods, and there are no jobs for women. These justifications are also similar to the results of this study discussed in this chapter. The why-educate girls' explanation shows that girls' education is costly and not useful given the lack of schools and jobs and this assumes that parents have to have as much food, clothes and other goods as possible, but their options are limited due to the money they have and the opportunity to earn money are limited. In most cases, since there are no opportunities to attend schools and no jobs for women, educating one's daughter will not bring in money and as a result, girls' child marriage is taken as the best alternative for parents.

The third conclusion made by this theory is dowry and bride-wealth practice which is partially similar to the result of this study as discussed in this chapter. This theory states as parents accept lower bride-wealth for older girls or have to pay higher dowries for older girls and consequently, potential grooms, or their families, prefer young brides. As discussed in this chapter, in Ethiopia bride-wealth (bride price) is commonly practiced and perpetuates a girl's child marriage. Bride price or bride-wealth is a payment by the groom's side or his family to the bride's parents. So, as shown in the theory of a social norm perspective on child marriage, older brides have less potential to produce higher bride-wealth. Therefore, parents must marry off their daughters at a younger age in order to get a higher bride price. On the other hand, dowry which is defined as a transfer of parental property, gifts, or money at the marriage of a daughter from the bride's family to the groom or his family is less contributed to child marriage in Ethiopia because rich family is less attracted to girls' child marriage.

As clearly explained in the revised family code of Ethiopia (2000), consent and age are among the essential conditions of marriage. Article 6 states that "a valid marriage shall take place only when the spouses have given their free and full consent." whereas Article 7(1) shows "neither a man nor a woman who has not

attained the full age of eighteen years shall conclude the marriage.” On the contrary, because of the factors that are discussed in this chapter, most girls in Ethiopia are still married without their “free and full consent” and attaining the full age of marriage.



## **Chapter Five: Consequences of Girls Child Marriage on their life in Ethiopia**

In this chapter, I discuss the consequence of girls' child marriage on their life status in Ethiopia based on the testimony of informants and review of the literature.

Child marriage leads to several negative consequences to the life statuses of girls' child brides. The consequences are physically, mentally, emotionally, economically, academically, and socially devastating (Nayak, 2013).

According to Bezie and Addisu (2019), in Ethiopia, girls' child marriage has serious health and socioeconomic consequences on married women. Some of these consequences include early pregnancy problems, lack of formal education opportunities, missing the opportunity for paid jobs and inequalities that leads to sexual violence, unbalanced income-generating opportunity, lack/little resources for achieving their regular needs, and gender inequality within and out of their households.

The data from Women, Children, and Youth Affairs in Ethiopia shows that child marriage has a negative consequence for child married girls because they have experienced, learned, and suffered in their life and face many problems. As a result, child marriage is seen as one of a negative approach to the girls' life status. Moreover, most girls are divorced and are forced to back to their parents, particularly those who have children, are often excluded and degraded by their family and the community as a whole. Similarly, Focused Group Discussants also shared how child marriage affects the life of child married girls because nobody understands and helps them to solve the problems that come out of child marriage. Consequently, hopelessness and living with sickness, particularly reproductive related health problems are manifested among the most child married girls in the country.

Further, study shows that the costs associated with income losses for women married as children are high. The gains in earnings and productivity that would have been observed today if women had not married at their childhood age are approximately 1.6 billion dollars (Savadogo and Wodon, 2017). These costs are most importantly related for the most part to the fact that child marriage limits the educational achievement of some girls who marry at their child age, and lower educational attainment leads to lower expected lifetime earnings. Therefore, Child

marriage has numerous negative consequences and is identified as a constraint to the development of girls' life statuses in Ethiopia. Based on the findings of this study, these consequences are categorized into five sections including, health-related consequence, gender inequality, a consequence on education, economic consequence, and consequence on decision-making opportunity.

### **5.1. The consequence of girls' child marriage on their health status**

According to the World Health Organization, health refers to a “state of complete well-being: mental, physical, and social and not merely the absence of diseases” (WHO, 1948). This definition shows that certain social/cultural aspects also affect the health of an individual. On the other hand, culture refers to a way of life of members of a society or group within a society. It includes how they dress, their marriage practice and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies, and leisure pursuits. Culture and community are closely connected, and they are tangled hence, affecting the health of an individual or the community. Girls' child marriage is among the cultural practices that affect the health of girls in society and the persistence of child marriage is seen as a way of life in the community.

Article 12 of the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) also states that everyone has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of mental and physical health (Bhabha, 2017). However, child marriage affects the health statuses of most girls in Ethiopia. For example, due to the maximum workload at domestic work like cooking, grass cutting, fetching water, collecting firewood, washing clothes, and others, child married girls face physical and mental health problems.

In Ethiopia, girls who marry at an early age also remain vulnerable and powerless due to a huge difference in age between them and their partners. Consistently, according to UNICEF Ethiopia (2019) finding, the spousal age differences are about ten years. That is adolescent girls' husbands are about ten years older than their wives. Due to this age gap, it can be argued that the girls' children are exposed to serious health complications such as unbalanced sexual life. The higher age gap led to health problems because child married girls are not matured and decided to have a healthy sexuality. They even fear telling their sexual desires and other health reproductive

health problems to the older husbands because as far as the age difference is higher the intimacy of the spouses is lower.

Child married girls are also exposed to the fistula problem, a situation that can cause a sense of shame and embarrassment because it leads to the inability to control urine. As a result, child married girls can be stigmatized and may be rejected by their husbands. Even paying for health is very difficult for them because most girls who marry at an early age tend to be among the poorest girls. The poorest girls mean they cannot access to quality and affordable health services. Most are financially dependent on their husbands who are also economically poor and cannot pay for their health. Others have limited say in how family's economies are allocated for reproductive health. Most participants in this study reported similar problems. Particularly, Bilise, one of the interviewees, explained her situation as follows:

*I got married when I was 13 years old to a man who was 25 years old. I gave birth to three children within six years. Because of frequent childbearing, heavy and prolonged domestic work, and having sexual activity without physical and psychological readiness, I was exposed to diseases like fistula and frequent bleeding. Then, my husband left me and started sexual life with another woman. Finally, he built another house and married that woman. Currently, he has one child from his second wife. He only comes to visit us when he wants to see his children and spends more time with his second wife. With the help of one of my brothers, I met a Non-Governmental Organization called World Vision which has been working in our district. They have been supporting people with health and financial problems like me. Thanks to this organization, currently I have been getting health service and my health status is almost good. Besides, they have been paying the school fee for my children.*

The above case shows that child married girls have lost their childhood and again enter into other serious health problems that they cannot easily escape from. In addition to missing the opportunity that unmarried girls enjoy, they are also left by their husbands and take the responsibility to support their children alone. One can also easily imagine how much frequent childbirths and shouldering family responsibility for child mothers further lead them to difficult health problems. Moreover, the case of Bilise remind me what we call pedophilia because her husband left her, and attracted

to another young girl who was comfortable and attractive for his sexual interest. Besides, Bilise's husband also abused her for his sexual desire, and left her once she encountered health problem. I argued that naturally old men are attracted to young girls for sexual desire. So, this situation also perpetuates the marriage between girls children and older men. When men are not sexually satisfied with their wives, they started to look at young girls for sexual pleasure. To do so, they left their wives and use different measures to marry young girls or to have forcible sexual activity with them.

The other health-related consequence of child marriage is maternal mortality. Childbearing brings significant risks to girl mothers because girls are more likely than older mothers to die in childbearing due to prolonged labor and lack of good nutrition. According to the report of the Human Development Index (HDI) (2019), in Ethiopia, 60% of women give birth without the help of skilled medical professionals and low-quality health facilities. Child marriage which is also followed by childbirth at an early age without the availability of quality health service increases the girl's vulnerability to health problems, even a higher percentage of maternal mortality ratios. For example, in Ethiopia, due to pregnancy-related causes, 353 women die for every 100,000 live births (HDI, 2019). This shows that child marriage which causes early pregnancy affects the health of the girl child negatively. Therefore, girls who marry at a young age are at a higher risk of dying during childbirth and exposed to different diseases in their lifetime. Similarly, Focused Group Discussions discussed that child marriage has devastating consequences and often negatively affects the lives of girls because child marriages are often not happy because girls lack the physical and emotional readiness required to handle marital responsibilities. Lack of happiness also affects the health of child married spouses. Focused Group Discussions also shared that child marriages are encountering more difficulties in the beginning than after they are staying in a marriage because the spouses were not familiar with each other and their new responsibilities. They argued that most child marriages are arranged by the family and it is impossible to introduce the spouses before the marriage day.

Child marriage can also increase married girls' vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases because, in the name of *waarsaa* (the culture that allows husbands to have sex with the wives of their uncles' sons), husbands are engaged in unprotected sexual

relations with other partners. Similarly, the study shows that a girl is physiologically more exposed to contracting HIV/AIDS than a male, as her sexual organ is not well lined with protective cells and her cervix may be penetrated easily (Alemu, 2008). This implies that child married girls are more likely to contract the disease through heterosexual contact because most often they are married to older men, more sexually experienced, and therefore it is difficult to have safe and healthy sexual activity. Malhotra (2010) also argues that child brides are also at a difficult risk of exposure to health problems than the brides who marry later in Ethiopia. Similarly, case two (Mastawot Tolu) explained that even though there is a law against child marriage, child marriage is still highly practiced and a girl who gets married early as I become traumatized, do not have a happy marriage, and sexually and physically abused.

Moreover, case one (Banchirga Shiferaw) also explained the consequence of child marriage on her health as:

*Due to this (Child marriage), my health status has been poor, and I was not happy for a single day in my life. When I think about my life trend, I lost my health, good nutrition, rest, and education due to my marriage at an early age.*

The case quoted above shows the consequence of child marriage on the health status of child married girls is higher, and, as such, married young girls will be more exposed to health problems than unmarried girls. The inability of young married girls to have safer sex will also lead to other health problems and worsen their health situation. The culture of child marriage practice is deep-rooted and cannot be easily fixed due to a lack of strong enforcement of the law and the vested interest of the majority of the society. Its associated health consequence is harsh for child married girls and it is also not an option for them rather most girls are forced by their family and the existing socio-cultural factors to accept it. It is also seen that girls are forced to accept child marriage but nobody takes the responsibility to help them when they are exposed to several health consequences coming out of child marriage.

## **5.2. Gender inequality**

Gender inequality is both the cause and consequence of child marriage. In Ethiopia, most girls who enter into marriage at child age are seen as a servant than respected

wives because the human right violation is higher for child married girls, and most men prefer to marry illiterate and younger girls to use them as a sexual servant and care-givers. Respecting older people is the common culture in Ethiopia, and it is in the name of respect that girls accept child marriage and secondary position. Most often, girls should respect older people, mainly men. They enter marriage in this sense and give fertile ground for the husband's superiority in household affairs. Similarly, the previous study has shown that the degree of gender inequality is higher among girls who marry at childhood and this affects the decision-making opportunities of girls (John, et al., 2019). Even though the community has limited understanding of how child marriages cause gendered power differences between spouses and their adverse effects, child marriage perpetuates gender inequality and also leads to poor quality of relationships among child married couples.

Data from Save the Children Ethiopia (2019) also shows that girls married before they turn 18 are less educated, have more children, and are most probably exposed to gender inequality. Therefore, they are more likely to experience domestic violence and believe that in some cases a man is justified in controlling the life of the wife. Therefore, the trend of increased violence is correlated to child marriage because it is reinforced when considering the relationship between child marriage and believing that, under specific circumstances, a man may be justified to even beat his wife. Women who were married as children are more likely than those who married as adults to believe that a man might be justified in beating his wife. Consistently, Bontu, one of the interviewees explained that:

*I am working in the women, Children, and Youth Affairs office in Western Ethiopia. Only a few women come to our office to report the case of beating by their husbands. Based on the research made by our organization, those women who boldly report the case of beating by their husbands are those who are matured and get married after they are turning 18 years old. Young brides fear to report the case and accept beating by husbands as part of their life.*

The discussion of focused groups shows that the reasons that justify a husband beating his wife included: going out without telling him, neglecting the children, arguing with him, refusing sex, burning the food, or unfaithfulness. They explained that any negative answer on any of these circumstances was considered as indicating

that there are circumstances where it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife. I argue that girls' child marriage affects the confidence of girls because they missed the opportunity to develop their knowledge and respect their rights. They do not know whether they have the legal privilege and consequently fear to report the beating by husbands. Besides, they learned from their mothers and grandmothers that beating by husbands is normal for women. So, complaining and reporting the case is very difficult for them. The worst thing is that even if they are beaten by husbands and physically injured, they do not get rest to recover from the sickness. They are still responsible to fulfill the household responsibilities as wives. From this, we can easily imagine how much it is hurtful for physically and mentally affected young mothers to lead a meaningful life.

It is a widely held view across the key informants, Focused Group Discussants, Interviewees, and case study informants that girls' child marriage contributes to gender inequality that will also lead to increased levels of domestic violence for women. Particularly, Hadas, among the interviewees further explained that these incidents were highly related to marriages between spouses who are not related in age. She provides as an example, the marriage between an older man and young girls, in which girls refused to consistently achieve the domestic and sexual roles supposed of them and this will bring insults and beating on them. This is also supported by the literature on child marriage. For example, Mahato (2016) argues as child married girls are more likely to be violated sexually, physically, and emotionally. They also face domestic violence from husband and mother-in-law at home. Moreover, most of them suffer from sexually transmitted diseases because there is no proper and sufficient plan for them at local and district level institutions and authorities. Besides, married girls in Ethiopia face a greater problem of gender-based violence and marital rape. I argue that though the term marital rape is there in the 1995 FDRE constitution, societies do not understand the term and see it as something illegal. In most cases there is a belief that in marriage women do not have the freedom to discuss safe sex. The concept of rape is culturally accepted only for unmarried girls, and women who are raped by someone who is not their husband. Based on this argument, I would say that marital rape for child married girls is common because the awareness of the issue is even lower among women who are married at the legal age.



The study also shows that girls who were married before the age of legal marriage are often at an increased risk of experiencing intimate partner violence (John, et al., 2019). This shows that child marriage directly or indirectly reduces agency for women and this will increase other risks like intimate partner violence. I agree that marriage should be established based on the mutual agreement of the couples. I mean, there should be good communication and understanding between the couples. To do so, both spouses should have an equal say and contribution to the existence of the institution. However, if there is a marriage between a girl child and the older husband or child spouses, there is no good communication and respect among them. Culturally, the husband is dominating and violating the wife therefore the relationship is similar to the master-slave relationships. In a master-slave relationship, the master has the power to dominate and violate the rights of the slave. Similarly, the girl who is a wife is treated as a slave and encounter intimate partner violence.

### **5.3. The consequence of girls' child marriage on their educational status**

I agree that education is very important for everyone for many purposes. Educated society knows their rights and responsibilities. However, the right to education for girls in most parts of Ethiopia is limited because of child marriage. They are forced to drop their schooling by the will of their parents, and if they may refuse their parents' will, it is seen as refusing to accept the existing socio-cultural factors and this led to severe problems. Moreover, marriage at child age denies girls children the opportunity to build their social and intellectual skills, including the ability to decide their life in their sense of autonomy and express themselves. These qualities are gained only by education, which child married girls are denied to achieve in their life. Similar to this, the study in Ethiopia shows that girls' quiet their education even not completing their primary or basic education due to child marriage (Mahato, 2016). To me, it is something contradictory to force girls to stop attending their schooling because they have legal rights to attend and complete their education. Besides, Ethiopia has adopted MDG's and SDG's that support the achievement of education for all. Here, I can say that culture dominates law because girls' child marriage which has only cultural acceptance is more prevalent. I mean, girls' child marriage is illegal action but culturally acceptable. On the other hand, girls' educational rights are violated by culture, not by the law. Law allows girls the right to learn but culture



denies girls the right to learn because girls' child marriage is a cultural practice that affects the educational opportunity of girls.

The data from Women, Children, and Youth Affairs in Southern Ethiopia also shows that most girls who were married at an early age are either deprived of their right to get the opportunity to join a school or forced to drop out of school. This shows that child marriage affects educational attainment for girls and the future educational opportunities of girls' children as well because educated mothers will educate their children whereas it is difficult for illiterate mothers to educate their children. Moreover, the data from Save the children Ethiopia (2019) also shows that child marriage is contributed to lower education of girls which also affects their economic status because child brides are less able than unmarried or older girls to access schooling and income-generating activities or to get benefit from education. Besides, girls who are already in school quit their schooling and enter into marriage by the decision of their husbands to continue their education after marriage. However, as Focused Group Discussants of this study discussed, girls who dropped their schooling and enter into marriage by the hope to continue their study will quit their education forever after marriage. The reasons are in some cases husbands are denied to allow them to continue their schooling and in other cases; girls who become mothers are busy with household responsibilities including frequent pregnancy and cannot continue their schooling. This finding is consistent with the previous study. For example, Wodon and Yedean (2017) state that in addition to their husbands' influence, other child marriage-related factors such as household responsibility, lack /limited mobility, pregnancy and raising children, and other socio-cultural restrictions for married girls forced them to discontinue their education after marriage and limiting the advantage from completing their education and getting employment opportunities.

It is also argued that the relationship between child marriage and educational opportunity for girls is complex, with each influencing the other. Even though government organizations and non-governmental organizations are nowadays advocating for girls' education by giving training for family and community members, for many girls in Ethiopia, the most options are to marry at an early age and only a few girls have the opportunity to continue formal schooling. This also comes out

clearly from informants. Case one (Banchirga Shifarew) explained as follows her reasoning for marrying off by dropping her schooling:

*... I was married when I was 14 years old by dropping my school from grade 6. Currently, I have four children. My family forced me to quit my education in grade six. My husband was 20 years old when he married me.*

This implies that child marriage practice strongly limits the educational opportunities of girls because family and the members of the community give more value for the benefit they get from child marriage than the advantage girls get from the achievement of their education. I agree that both marriage and education are among the most important social institutions but one should come after the other. Marriage should be established after educational attainment. Considering marriage as the most important and education as less or not important for girls is what has been seen from the concept of girls' child marriage. To me, uneducated girls do not have a happy married life because education is a package that has all things in it. From this, I learned that what is culturally defined as 'good' is stronger than reality. The reality is girls should be educated, and then they can marry. But culture defines marriage as something very important than education.

#### **5.4. The consequence of girls' child marriage on their economic status**

The largest consequences of child marriage in terms of economic costs are through limiting the girls' opportunity in developing themselves and expanding the means of generating income. That is, girls who enter into child marriage are interrupted their schooling, and the opportunity to have a means of generating income is limited for them. Without having a good education, it is very difficult for girls to have good economic standards. As also discussed in section 5.3 most girls are promised to continue their education after marriage but only a few gets the opportunity to continue it. Others are denied and dominated by family responsibilities and forget about their schooling. This situation paralyzes the economic status of child married girls. Besides, child marriage leads girls to have children earlier and many in their life span. This, in turn, decreases the ability of the family to fulfill their basic needs and thereby leads to poverty. Consequently, girls who married at child age are most likely to become poor, and more likely to live in poverty and raise children in poverty and this will also affect the future economic statuses of their children and recycle poverty. Similarly,

the study shows as child marriage affects the girls who marry at an early age as well as their children in many aspects. For example, Emire (2005) and Wodon et al. (2018) state as child marriage leads women to have more children over their lifetime than if they had married later. This negatively affects their educational achievement, thereby restricting their future opportunities to get well-paid jobs. The argument is that most of the child mothers are illiterate and do not know how to use family planning. I agree that it is even not easy for literate women to use family planning because they are denied to do so. In most cases, it is decided by men than women or the decision of both. So, lack of knowledge about how to control birth plus lack of opportunity to use family planning makes the situation more complex for child mothers.

Having a large number of children is the feature of a poor family in Ethiopia. It is also associated with child marriage. In most rural Ethiopia, having many children is seen as the source of prestige. And girls who marry at their childhood give birth until their menopause period without using family planning and birth control methods. This also contributes to lower economic status for the family. Similarly, Tsegereda, who was the interview participant explained as she encountered financial problems even to celebrate her child's birthday as also discussed in chapter four. Another interview participant, Kulani also told her experience as:

*I am the first-born girl child for my family and forced to marry off when I was 12 years old by dropping my education. My childhood vision became only a daydream and currently, I am the mother of five children. My husband always drinks alcohol and does not give attention to work. It is the responsibility of me and my children to feed ourselves and give money for my husband for a drink. I am a very poor and hungry woman and always cry by looking at my unhappy life.*

The case of these participants shows that child marriage negatively affects the economic statuses of children married girls in a way that they quit their education and missed the opportunity to be economically empowered. Lack of skill and freedom to develop their economic status is supplemented with having a large number of children and put the life of child married girls in acute poverty. The other argument that can be developed here is that parents sell their daughters and boost their economic statuses but daughters are economically poor because they lost the opportunity to boost their economic statuses due to marriage in childhood. The economic benefit that is gained

from girls' child marriage is for parents than girls. So, girls are used as a means of generating income for parents.

### **5.5. The consequence of girls' child marriage on their decision-making opportunity**

The other consequence of child marriage in Ethiopia is that girls drop their education and become economically dependent on their husbands and consequently lack the power to decide what is going on in their life. I argue that education and income status of girls determine their future development and decision-making opportunity including when and whom to marry. Besides, it determines their decision-making status after marriage, concerning issues affecting their lives and their family's life. Illiterate and Less educated girls are less access to information, which is very important for human development. Lack of information affects girls' ability and opportunity to decide their life on the path of their plan. So, they accept the decision of others like family and husband and become dependent. Even, as part of the family member, the opportunity to share their ideas and pursuing their husbands on the issues they have in common is very low. For example, they cannot influence their husbands to get an HIV/AIDS test; they fear or less accepted to tell their husbands to abstain from intercourse or request for condom use in case they suspect their husbands are HIV/AIDS positive or have another sexually transmitted disease; they cannot decide that their husbands must be monogamous, and they cannot easily leave /divorce their husbands because they do not know how to get legal support. Moreover, returning to their families' homes by divorcing their husbands may not be an easy option because divorce is considered unwelcome and may have serious negative implications on their life, their child, and their households as well because insults and other socioeconomic problems will be followed.

Focus Group Discussants discussed that it is very difficult for girls who are married at their childhood to make decisions regarding safe sex and the mode of lifestyle they want to follow. They argued that any decision that comes from the wife is disqualified and only the decision of the husband is accepted and practiced. They further told that against the idea of man in their community is seen as shame and followed by penalties like beating and insults. They also discussed as only a few women who are matured and well-educated before marriage can influence the idea of their husbands.

According to the discussants who are government employees, due to the existing strong socio-cultural values realizing one's vision for women in their community is very challenging. They explained as even within educated families, women's opportunity to make their own decision as an individual and family member is very low. They told that women accept this inferiority because most of them get married at their childhood and not well-empowered to stand for their rights. Similarly, Kebebech, one of the interview participants explains her experience as:

*I was married when I was a child and this affects my decision-making opportunity. If I want to buy something and need to visit the nurse when I was pregnant, I request my husband through elders for money. Every property is under his control and I always need his permission. If I was seen when selling our common property, he has beaten me.*

As the above discussion of the Focused Group Discussants and Kebebech shows, child marriage deprives child married girls the opportunity to decide about their life. Consequently, they are forced to take responsibility for domestic roles, motherhood, unwanted sexual relations, and denied having their future dream about a career and developing themselves. I argue that decision-making about issues affecting one's self is one of the most important issues for human beings. Human beings are naturally endowed to control other beings than to be controlled by others. These natural gifts of human beings to decide about themselves and the world is well-developed by education and training. But, child marriages dwarf these gifts for girls and make them dependent on others. To use their constitutional rights girls should know about it. Without knowing what their rights are it is impossible to use it. So, they understand subordination as something naturally assigned to women. I argue that the decision-making ability of human beings depends on their educational status. The one who is well-educated has more ability and opportunity than others. But, illiterate or less educated individuals see a few things and have few options in life. They live by the decision of others because they have no knowledge and space to make their decision. So, child marriage forced girls to fulfill the interest of others by limit the opportunity to make their own decisions and dig out their potential.

In Ethiopia, the marriage residence is patrilocal, in which girls are left their family's home to settle with her husband and his family in the husband's home or community.

This may also affect the confidence of girls to have a say in the family because they left their parents and friends at childhood who can at least advise and support them, and enter into new households where they have no or little say in their own lives or household matters. This is consistent with the previous study in Ethiopia. For example, Marshall, et al. (2016) notes that young married girls often are marginalized and powerless to make the decision that affects their interest and the interest of their households. They have no or less power to get support for issues in their interest and vision. Therefore, they are often exposed to deprivation and threats of rejection and divorce. I argue that power is central to make a decision because individuals who have no power do not have the ability to make a decision. Consistently, girls who become wives and mothers at childhood are powerless and unable to make decisions influencing their life.

Even if the right to divorce is mostly seen as an essential step forward for uncomfortable child married girls, they are not heard and cannot easily follow the legal procedure to do so. If they want a divorce, they are forced to leave their properties and choose to work unsecured daily works to support their children. Besides, In Ethiopia, divorced women are stigmatized and exposed to various problems. Similarly, Women, Children, and Youth Affairs Manager from Northern Ethiopia of the Awi zone explained that most girls are forced to marry to marriage partners who are not their choice and are consequently exposed to unhappy married life. Since divorce is not easy for them they have no option to divorce and forced to live the marriage life that is limiting their needs and interests.

As the overall discussion in this chapter shows the consequence of child marriage are so devastating and negatively affects the life of child married girls in Ethiopia. These consequences are also complex and interdependent. For instance, dropping school as a result of child marriage highly affects health, economic, decision-making opportunity, and women's status in households and also their community. Moreover, the poor economic status of child mothers highly limits their opportunity to invest in their health and decide the issues that are influencing their life. This implies that one consequence also causes another problem and this makes the life of child married girls in Ethiopia more vulnerable and difficult.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

By analyzing the causes and consequences of girls' child marriage in Ethiopia, this thesis has shown how girls' child marriage is still prevalent due to various causes and negatively affects the life statuses of child married girls. The findings of this study particularly show that poverty, illiteracy, gender inequality, bride-wealth and virginity, family honor, socio-cultural norms, and religious laws are the root causes of child marriage practice in the country. These causes for the persistence of girls' child marriage revolve around these factors and justified by socio-cultural practices. The findings of this study also show that the consequences of girls' child marriage on their health, education, position in family and community, economy, and decision-making power tend to be substantial.

Girls' child marriage affects girls' earnings and productivity primarily due to the fact that child marriage restricts girls' education, and lack of or low educational attainment becomes a key factor affecting earnings. This indirectly affects their health status because poor and uneducated mothers are less likely to get good health treatment, particularly reproductive health services. It is also associated with earlier and higher fertility rates which will negatively affect their economic and health status. Uneducated and young mothers have also a secondary position in households and do not get the opportunity to make their own decisions. Therefore, they have little/no power to make decisions within their households, a greater probability of dropping their schools, lower-earning opportunities due to lower participation in labor market, and less control over the property of the households.

According to the findings of this study, child brides also experience poorer health problems and exposed to give birth at childhood which will also lead to complicated health problems and higher maternal mortality rates. Child marriage for a very young girl shows missing the opportunity other girls enjoy and to be exposed to difficult situations. The higher age gap between the child bride and her husband highly affects her opportunity to make personal and household decisions throughout her life span in marriage. The decision to have safe sexual matter and control the numbers of children to be born is completely taken from child married girls. Moreover, the burden of domestic activities and reproductive roles limits their opportunity to have personal freedom that helps to learn and develop their skills. As a result, in most cases, they are treated as inferior and house servants than respected wives.

I argue that child marriage practice in Ethiopia undermines sustainable development goals and therefore, ending child marriage practice is an essential element of sustainable development goals. It hinders poverty alleviation; the achievement of universal primary education for all, gender equality promotion, and maternal health. This harmful traditional practice needs to be eradicated by valuing the contribution of girls within these wide developmental concerns. To end these various problems caused by child marriage, it needs particular attention and the cooperative action of individuals, households, communities, and both governmental and nongovernmental organizations. The findings of this study only show the situation on the causes of girls' child marriage and how it negatively affects their lives statuses. Therefore, there is still a need to undertake extensive research at various levels concerning the consequence of child marriage on the society and how to overcome the problem.



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## Appendix

### **The UDHR Provisions Relating to Child Marriage**

Article 16:

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality, or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family.
2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending parties.

### **The CRC Provisions Related to Child Marriage :**

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

Article 2: Freedom from discrimination on any grounds, including sex, religion, ethnic or social origin, birth, or other statuses.

Article 3: In all actions concerning children...the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Article 12: The right to express his or her views freely in all matters affecting the child in accordance with age and maturity.

Article 19: The right to protection from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parents, guardian or any other person.

Article 24: The right to health and to access to health services; and to be protected from harmful traditional practices.

### **Particular CEDAW conventions related to child marriage include:**

Article 16 (1) States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular, shall ensure, on a basis of equality of 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 their free and full consent;
- (c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution;
- (d) The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases, the interests of the children shall be paramount;
- (e) The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education, and means to enable them to exercise these rights;
- (f) The same rights and responsibilities concerning guardianship, wardship, trusteeship, and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases, the interests of the children shall be paramount;
- (g) The same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession, and an occupation;
- (h) The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment, and disposition of property, whether free of charge or for a valuable consideration.

Article 16 (2) states 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 and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.