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## PREVALENCE, CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF DIVORCE IN BAHIR DAR CITY, ETHIOPIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigated the prevalence, causes and consequences of divorce in Bahir Dar City, Ethiopia. Mixed methods design was employed for the study and both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. For the quantitative data 361 randomly selected households and for the qualitative part 8 divorcees and 8 purposively selected community and religious leaders participated. Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data while qualitative data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. The quantitative data were analyzed quantitatively using percentage and mean while the qualitative data were narrated and paraphrased. The result of the study indicated that the prevalence of divorce in three consecutive years (2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16) were 24%, 26.28% and 49.72% respectively. Moreover, the data from questionnaire respondents indicate that 46.5% of households were divorced. The major causes of divorce fall under psychological, social and economical issues respectively. The conclusion of the study is that unless interventions are made the rate of divorce will continue resulting in the psychosocial and economic crises. Hence based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that short term training on marriage counseling need to be designed for elderly and religious leaders. Intervention and prevention programs need to be established where married people access professional family counseling services in their surroundings. Additionally, different community based and nongovernmental organizations are expected to give pre-marriage counseling and training for couples on child care responsibilities, communication and conflict management skills.*

**KEY TERMS:** divorce, prevalence, causes, consequences

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## INTRODUCTION

Any reflections on divorce, originates from the concept of marriage. And marriage is said to be the fundamental principle or practice of the society and when couples get married it is assumed that they do it by will, feeling that they would live joyfully ever after (Selome, 2007). Through marriage two individuals start to live together to continue their marital life as well as for the creation of a new generation. However, divorce is a legal termination of marriage (Seid, 2014 cited in Rogers and Skinner, 1996). Divorce has severe impact on the family and on society. It breaks relatives; interrupts infant rearing as well as mothers and their children's social and economical protection in the society (Aktar, 2013).

In Ethiopia, divorce is prevalently practiced. For instance, in Tilsen and Larson, (2000), it is stated that 45 per cent of first marriages in Ethiopia end in divorce within 30 years. Similarly, in the 1994 population and housing census in Addis Ababa it was indicated that, "among 506, 852 married couples 97,147 were divorced". Regardless of the causes behind and the effects it results, divorce is becoming among the major societal problems in Ethiopia in general and in Bahir Dar City Administration in particular.

The major causes of divorce among the Amhara people in North Shewa zone were, "childlessness, physical abuse, maltreatment, wasting money, adultery, exerting too much control over personal activities, forcing intercourse, homesickness, and a large difference in age" (Serkalem, 2006:19, cited from Tilsen & Larsen, 2000). The conformity of couples to divorce or a request for divorce is the outcome of failure of the family for numerous personal, societal and financial causes (Daniel, 1994; cited in Yohannis, 2015). Additionally, Askalemariam and Minwagaw (2013), stated that conflict management problems, parental interference and communication problems, lack of promise to marriage, alcohol addiction, physical abuse, sexual incompatibility, falling out of love, financial problem and lack of maturity the major causes of divorce.

Concerning its consequence, divorce, exposed children to social, economic and psychological problems (Fagan & Rector, 2000). Similarly, (Tareegn, 2015) stated that separation of the couple's consequences in psychological, social and economical difficulties for the parents and their children and the society as the whole. Moreover, Seid, 2014 cited in Venter, 2006), forwarded that the impact of separation between pairs results in lifelong crisis of enormous proportion that makes the start of painful process of changes including major troubles in the family system.

Other studies also showed that the termination of husband and wife are connected with a various social problems. For example, divorced women have no or a little social connection with the community and are more likely to lack social support (Gahler, 2006). In addition, divorced women experienced negative life events and physical and psychological ill-health. Furthermore, divorce may affect their mental health in a more negative way; they have also, the major custody of children, and are more likely to experience parental responsibility overload. Similarly, as to Kitson and Morgan (1990), the effects of divorce for individuals are it reduce income and standards of living for women, and their children living with them have been found to be exposed for financial difficulty.

Likewise, after the separation of their parents children faced emotional and behavioral difficulties connected with different stresses. Divorce also affects children negatively to change their life (school dropout, engaging in addiction, develop anti social behaviors) (Amato, 2001). Several studies showed that children and their family going through divorce have a higher occurrence of psychological, social and economical problems. Divorce can be a stressful experience, which affects the economical, social and psychological wellbeing of both divorcees; especially mothers and their children. Hence this study tried to examine the prevalence, major causes and consequences of divorce in Bahir Dar City Administration.

In local study, Semhal (2007) stated that the most divorced in Ethiopia is uneducated and also house wives and these divorced women are living without support. Serkalem (2006), concluded that divorced women in Ethiopia are economically weak and usually engage in informal sectors like selling home made products (local beer/Tella, Arekie and Injera, etc), collecting wood and retailing activities after divorce. Because of this their living condition is almost miserable. Serkalem's finding also indicated that their social connection with the society is almost isolated because divorce does not enable them to get the moral and economical support they need. Though, she studied the socio economic impact of divorce, she did not see the prevalence and consequence of divorce.

Similarly, Yohanis (2015), attempted to investigate the economic and social impacts of divorce on divorced women. Many of the divorced women were found to be depending on agriculture and insecure income source such as activities to generate income for their survival mainly preparing local bears to make their living. Yohannis also focused only on socio economic impact of divorce in specific Kebele (Hulet Ejju Enessie Woreda: Addis Zemen Kebele). However, he did not see the prevalence, causes and psychological consequences of divorce.

Again, Askalemariam and, Minwagaw (2013) stated that, there is high rate of divorce in Dejen and Aneded Woredas resulted from lack of conflict management skills, interference from parents of spouses and communication problems. Likewise, the possible consequences of such divorces were anti-social behaviors,

school dropout, engage in addiction, and develop antisocial behavior, theft and immoral acts of conduct on children

This study is different from the earlier research mentioned so far because the study area of the previous research was mainly in rural settings which are different from the demographic nature and context of Bahir Dar city. Besides, the study did not investigate the trend and prevalence of divorce while the current study focuses on such areas. Even, there is no adequate and comprehensive study on the prevalence, causes and consequences of divorce in Bahir Dar city. Consequently, research attempted to answer the following research questions.

1. To what extent is divorce prevalent in Bahir Dar city Administration?
2. What are the major causes of divorce in Bahir Dar city Administration?
3. What are the consequences of divorce in Bahir Dar city Administration?

## METHODS

In this study pragmatic paradigm approach that concerns with solutions to problems instead of focusing on methods are used (Cresswell, 2009). For triangulation and enriching the data mixed-methods approach is employed. Amongst the nine sub-cities of Bahir Dar city, four sub cities (Belay Zeleke, Gishabay, Sefene selam and Shumabo) were selected using simple random sampling technique. The total numbers of households in the sample sub-cities were 19,568 (CSA, 2007). After selecting the above mentioned sub-cities, 392 sample households were selected using proportional random sampling technique. However, out of the 392 participants only 361 (Males=196 and Females=165) filled and returned the questionnaires and the analysis was made using the response from 361 participants.

This study also involved eight divorcees for the semi structured interview (three males and six females) by using convenient sampling techniques. Additionally, focus group discussion was conducted with purposely selected eight kebele elders (1 woman and 3 men) and religious leaders (4 orthodox Christians).

The main data collection instruments of this study were questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion and document analysis. Both close-ended and open-ended questionnaire were employed. Questionnaire was used because it is convenient to collect data from large number of respondents within a short period of time (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The questionnaire was translated to Amharic for ease of understanding and was disseminated to the respondents (married and divorced) individuals. The questionnaire has 61 Likert scale items consisting of six subcategories. Semi structured interview was also used for the qualitative part. It was conducted with purposively selected three males and six female divorcees.

Focus group discussions (FGD) was employed to collect some important issues not addressed in the individual interview. FGDs were held with elderly and religious who have engagement in marriage facilitation and dissolution. Moreover, to see data on the prevalence of divorce and its patterns, the researchers tried to assess the cases of divorce from Bahir Dar City District Court. The data gathered from the document were for three consecutive years (2013/14 to 2015/16).

The data collection process was done based on the consent of participants. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants and their privacy and confidentiality issues were given due attention.

Quantitative data were analyzed using percentage and mean and the qualitative data obtained from interview and focus group discussion were analyzed qualitatively in thematic and narration process and also some impressive and important transcripts were described in a verbatim.

## RESULTS

The results of this study revealed that there is a high prevalence rate of divorce in Bahir Dar City Administration across three years in the sample court. This study revealed that a total number of 5,901 divorced cases were approved in the selected court from 2013/14 to 2015/16.

Out of this, 1,416 (24%) individuals in 2013/14; 1,551 (26.28 %) individuals in 2014/15 and the remaining 2,934 (49.72%) individuals were divorced in 2015/16 respectively. This showed that the rate of divorce is increasing from time to time. While it is indicated in percentage, 2014/15 has shown 2.28% increment in contrast to 2013/14 similarly; in 2015/16 a 23.47% increment in comparison with 2014/15 is indicated. Results found from questionnaires within the four sub-cities revealed that, from the total number of 361 respondents, 168 (46.5%) were divorced. This data indicated that the prevalence of divorce in Bahir Dar City Administration is increasing in an alarming rate. As it was also proved from the open ended questionnaires and discussions, they repeatedly stated that the prevalence rate of divorce increase from year to year.

Regarding with the causes of divorce which was examined from psychological, social and economical point of view, the mean rank indicated that psychological causes (4.46), social causes (4.38) and economic causes (4.24). Majority of the respondents revealed that psychological (including sexual incompatible, distrust, drug addicted) cases was the main causes of divorce following by social (including absence of open discussion between couples, engagement in extra-marital affairs and family interference) causes of divorce.

This result was supported with the qualitative result which stated that the main psychological reasons for increasing divorce between couples include; difference in interest for sexual desire, problem of trust, sexual intercourse with someone else other than his wife /her husband, addiction of chat, alcohol, and cigarette. Concerning the consequences of divorce, the mean rank also revealed that psychological consequences are the major problem (4.50) followed by social consequences (4.45) and economic consequences (4.47). The result further indicated that economic social and psychological causes and consequences are interrelated to each other.

## DISCUSSION

This finding is consistent with the earliest findings which indicated that the rate of divorce is alarmingly increasing in all over the world (Bramlett and Mosher, 2001). Erulkar and Muthengi (2009) also indicated that Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of early marriage which results in divorce later in sub Saharan Africa. This study is also similar with Kiernan & Mueller (1998)'s finding which stated that divorce can be caused and varied based on gender, age and social class of the couples.

A study conducted in Nigeria by Umoh and Adeyemi (2000), showed that, religious differences, sexual incompatibility, cross-cultural marriages and age differences were indicated as other factors of divorce. This study is also consistent with Serkalem (2006)'s report which stated that; sexual incompatibility, pressure from friends and families, difference in religious and ethnic background were the major causes of divorce in Addis Ababa city. Similarly, Fincham (2003) explained that perceived inequity in a couple's division of labor, conflict over power, extramarital sex, intoxication or drug use and husbands being jealous is strongly associated with marital conflict and also related to marital dissatisfaction.

The interview and FGD result also asserted that: having extra affairs, early marriage, misunderstanding between the couples, and lack of open discussion and unnecessary family interference, resource controlled by either of the two couples were social cause for divorce.

This study further revealed that divorce creates economic, social and psychological problems on the divorced families and their children. This result is supported by previous studies. For example, Serkalem (2006) indicated that divorce affects the relationships of divorced women with their relatives and friends. She further explained that the social life and relationship of divorced women did have much difference from married one. Her finding indicated that among divorced women, more than half reported that the support they had been getting from relatives and friends has stopped after they divorced.

Divorce in its turn can be a cause for drunkenness, and it also lead to have a loose relation between fathers and their children. Furthermore, lack of fulfilling basic needs of children's, reduction of income and economic crisis are also the main economic consequences of divorce. Garner (2008) stated that an acute sense of failure often found in the newly divorced that can lead to depression and even suicide and in comparison to married people, the divorced exhibit higher rates of depression, suicide, alcohol abuse and mental health problem. Ambert (2009) also strengthened the above idea by asserting that divorce creates a series of stress for parents, particularly for custodial parents. Many divorced parents are so preoccupied and emotionally burdened and in turn they become depressed.

Similarly, negative economic consequences experienced by divorced Ethiopian women in urban areas include a reduced standard of housing, difficulty in paying school fees for their children, food insecurity, medical problems, and insufficient money to buy clothing and other resources needed for subsistence life (Tilsen and Larsen, 2000).

The interview and FGD findings also revealed that divorcees and their children were considering themselves as neglected and isolated by the society and feel in stress, and become dissatisfied in their life. Children of divorced families develop inferiority complex due to feeling of helpless and hopeless and later develops distrust for their relatives. This finding is supported by Kelly (2000)'s report which indicated that children of divorced parents may have greater risk of adjusting in areas of social relationships, education, self-concept, behavior, and psychological well-being. Parents also face anxiety, exhaustion, and stress after the divorce resulting in the decline of the assistance they give to their children in terms of affections, language stimulation, academic support, emotional support, financial assistance, and support in social maturity (Kelly, 2000).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The prevalence of divorce in Bahir Dar City administration is increasing from time to time. As the document analysis indicated that the divorce rate from 2013/14 – 2015/16 is getting higher and higher and likewise the current study shows that 46.5% out of 361 respondents were divorced. This empirical data indicated that prevalence of divorce in Bahir Dar city was high. From this study, the most prevailing causes of divorce were found to be psychological in nature. The major psychological causes for divorce include sexual incompatible, mistrust, addicted to alcoholic drinks and intolerance. The second cause for divorce from the study was social with its major causes such as having extra affairs, partners engaged with the early marriage, misunderstanding

between the couples and unnecessary family interference. The major economic causes in this study were the resource controlled by either of the two couples and insufficient income.

Like the cause psychological consequences is also the major once that are highly affecting the couples from different perspectives followed by social and economic consequences respectively. This is because of the combination of both the social and economic consequences by itself will aggravate the psychological consequences as its final result.

Currently from this study, incompatible sex between husband and wife is the main cause that results in mis-trust between the two couples, intolerance between couples that lead to divorce as a result, divorcee and their children will be exposed to drug addiction. To concluded, divorce diminishes not only the family socio-economic and psychological well beings but also society at the whole.

Based on the findings, it is suggested that reducing divorce and maintaining the marriage of couples of Bahir Dar city is mandated which can be done via increasing the commitment of both the wife and the husband for developing trust and mutual understanding. Community elders and religious leaders shall play a role in consulting couples. For increasing easiness of the mediation among elders and religious leaders short and long term training on marriage counseling need to be designed for these people. In addition, intervention and prevention programs need to be established where married peoples access professional family counseling services in their surroundings along with pre-marriage counseling and training for couples on child care responsibilities, communication skills and conflict management skills that shall be framed as a policy.

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