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## Marital Dissatisfaction, Coping Mechanisms, and the Likelihood of Divorce among Selected Districts of Jimma Zone, South Western Ethiopia

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# Marital Dissatisfaction, Coping Mechanisms, and the Likelihood of Divorce among Selected Districts of Jimma Zone, South Western Ethiopia

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**Abstract-** Marital satisfaction is a mental state that portrays the person's perceived benefits and costs in ones marital relationship and has been an important area of inquiry and intervention for many researchers and practitioners. The primary quest of this empirical endeavor is determining the level of marital dissatisfaction, the coping mechanisms and its relationship with divorce in the study area. To address the desired objectives, 240 married couples were surveyed and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale to measure marital satisfaction was used as a major instrument. Key informant interview was used to collect qualitative data. Both descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analysis the quantitative data. Results indicated sizable numbers of couples are dissatisfied in their marital relationship in one way or another. In addition, it's understood that marital dissatisfaction is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the occurrence of divorce. Though couples try to negotiate among themselves to settle their marital discontent, the majority preferred the advisory of elders. Diverting the adverse effects of polygamous marriage, teaching and devising various family planning programs and introducing family and marriage counsellors in the area are highly recommended.

**Keywords:** marital dissatisfaction, coping mechanisms, divorce, jimma zone, Ethiopia.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a socially authorized long-standing mating arrangement that typically involves economic, social, and reproductive cooperation between the partners. Although the norms that preside over the choice of a spouse and the surrounding marriage ceremonies show discrepancy from culture to culture, the institution of marriage is found in all known human societies (Ponzetti 2003). Traditionally, choices and decisions about the sexual aspects of married life including when and how to initiate sexual activity, the amount and type of sex, the timing and number of children, and the use of contraception were considered as the exclusive province of the male partner (Ponzetti 2003). Ernest Burger, a prominent sociologist wrote, in 1953, "urbanization, greater mobilization, individualization, increased secularization, emancipation of women had transformed the family from an institution based on law and custom, to one based on companionship and love" (Furstenberg 1996:35 as

cited in Mathews NY). Thus, these social changes like cohabitation increased the probability of dissatisfaction over marriage and divorce (Ubesekeera and Luo 2008).

Marital (dis)satisfaction has continued to be an extensively researched topic on various forms of investigation on family life and marriage (Zianah *et al.* 2012; Nelson 2011; Shackelford *et al.* 2008; Bagwell 2006; Mathews NY). According to Schoen *et al.* (2002), marital satisfaction is a global evaluation of the state of one's marriage and a reflection of marital happiness and functioning. Fowers (1998) stated that marital satisfaction has for many become a yardstick to measure the success and stability of a marriage and by extension, personal fulfilment and wellbeing. The ideal of marital satisfaction is so strong that many spouses deceive themselves about the extent to which their marriage meets their particular criterion for satisfaction. Spouses engage in positive illusions about marriage by dramatically underestimating their chances of divorce and making unreasonably positive statements about their spouses. These illusions seem to help spouses to believe that their marriage approaches the ideal ones to which *they* aspire (Fowers 1998:521). However, this also complicates the task of researchers who are attempting to investigate marital satisfaction. The complex and diverse nature of marital satisfaction allows us to study only a fraction of the available variables related to this subject.

It is important to recognize that most research on marital satisfaction and other types of sexuality has been conducted with participants from industrialized western societies. Very little data are available about the marital satisfaction and sexuality of men and women in non-Western societies. There is no exception for Ethiopia and little has been done in Ethiopia and specifically in Jimma zone and one of the aim of this research is to fill the scanty of literature. Most of the time researchers give priority and attention to the issue of divorce, its cause and effect and leave untouched that of the nexus between marital dissatisfaction & divorce and the coping mechanisms that couples employ when they get dissatisfied in their marital endeavour. Thus, ultimately, the study sought to answer questions like; what looks like the level of marital dissatisfaction in the study area? Does marital dissatisfaction ultimately brings the rampancy of divorce? What are the coping

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strategies couples employ to cope up with marital dissatisfaction?

This study will provide multifaceted advantages for different groups. It will deliver concrete information concerning level of marital (dis)satisfaction, its relationship with divorce, and the multifarious coping strategies spouses deploy to handle their marital dissatisfaction. It also helps policy makers to get insightful and phenomenal ideas concerning the issue of marital dissatisfaction for further intervention. Besides, the study will also serve as a base line for further investigation.

## II. METHODS

A cross sectional survey research design supplemented with other qualitative research methods was employed to accomplish the study. The researchers employed both qualitative and quantitative research approaches to conduct this study. The qualitative research was used to understand the meaning spouses attach to their marriage, their experiences of marital dissatisfaction and coping mechanisms that couples use. The quantitative research was employed to determine the level of marital dissatisfaction, and reaction to marital dissatisfaction and coping strategies employed by the respondents.

Survey questionnaire was used to collect from spouses regarding their perception and level of marital satisfaction, reaction and coping strategies of marital dissatisfaction. The researchers adapted ENRICH marital satisfaction scale to assess the level of marital satisfaction of respondents. The scale has 10 marital satisfaction items representing the diverse areas of marital relationship which includes personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationship, children and parenting, family and friends, equalitarian roles and religious orientation.

The researchers conducted key informant interview with elders, personalities working in justice office, workers of women and children’s affairs office. From these concerned bodies a more detailed data was obtained to supplement the quantitative data. The primary data necessary for the study was collected by employing data collection techniques like questionnaire and interview guide. The secondary data was gathered from documents of various sources which already exist. The study area of the research was delimited to Jimma zone of Oromiya regional state. This area is selected because of vicinity advantage for the researchers and also absence of such an adequate study on the topic in this area was the enigma behind selecting Jimma zone (*Zone is the third layer in administrative structure of Ethiopia*) as the study setting. The researchers employed both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to select samples. From probability

sampling technique, multistage cluster sampling was used. Four *Weredas* (*the second lowest administrative structure in Ethiopia*), (Jimma town & Agaro town as Urban district and Dedo & Omo Nada as rural district) were randomly selected from Jimma zone and then one Kebele (*the lowest administrative structure in Ethiopia*) was included in each *Wereda*. A total of 240 married couples were surveyed from four Kebeles namely Awitu Mendera, Sito, Nada Sekota, and Agaro 03. The detail for survey participants is discussed in the subsequent table.

Table 1 : Summary of the study area and participants

District	Kebele	Households size	Sample size	percent
Jimma	Awitu Mendera	1300	52	21.7
Agaro	Agaro 03 (Tigi)	1371	61	25.4
Dedo	Sito	731	70	29.2
Omonada	Neda Sekote	550	57	23.8
<b>Total</b>		<b>3952</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>100.0</b>

With regard to qualitative participants, key informants were selected purposively. Accordingly, four expertise in women and children affairs, four prosecutors, and three elderly were included in the study. Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyse the quantitative data. To this end, frequency distribution, percentage, mean, ANOVA, T-test, chi square test were used. The qualitative data was analysed thematically and was concurrently integrated with the quantitative one. The reliability and validity of the instrument was checked appropriately. In relation to reliability, the instrument was pretested with 15 married spouses and the internal consistency was checked through Cronbach alpha. With the pre test, some items were rejected while other items were reshuffled.

The researchers maintained and observed all ethical aspects of doing research. In conducting this study, ethical considerations like securing informed consent, keeping the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, full right to withdraw at any time; to change ideas or to edit recorded materials, careful recruitment of enumerators; provision of training for data collectors regarding the objectives of the study, ethical procedures & how to interview and all administrative ethical procedures were followed.

## III. RESULTS

This part of the article presents the findings and discussion of the study. The data was collected from 240 survey participants and key informants from *Wereda* Justice Office, women and children affairs, and elderly people. To make clear for readers, the finding part of the paper is presented in line with the research questions

posed at the very on-set of the study. Moreover, an attempt was made to relate and compare the findings with the already existing empirical endeavours.

a) *Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants*

Table 2 below depicts the socio-demographic profiles of survey participants. About 52.1% of the survey participants were female while 47.9% of them were males. In relation to the age distribution of respondents, 24.2%, 38.8%, 22.9%, 12.9%, and 1.3% of the participants were under the age range of 20-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60 and 61-70 respectively. In addition, the age of the participants of the study ranges from 20 to 67 with the mean of 39.49 and standard deviation 9.956. The table also indicates the religious affiliation of respondents. Accordingly, 78.2% of the respondents were Muslims, 13.9% were orthodox Christians, 5.8 were

Protestants, and 2.5 were Catholics. From this we can witness that Islam as a religion is the most common and widely followed religion in the study area. The employment status of respondents in table 1 below portrays 31.2%, 17.9%, 13.2%, 12.8%, 11.1%, 9.8%, and 3.8% were farmers, housewives, self-employed, GO/NGO/Private sector employed, daily labourer, engaged in different activities (petty trade, animal breeding, etc.), and unemployed respectively. In relation to participants' formal educational level, the majority (35%) of them can't read and write. 22.7%, 21.3%, 10.8%, and 9.2% have primary education can read and write, tertiary school and above, and the remaining have the chance to join secondary schools. Further, table below vividly indicates 52.9% of them are living in rural setting while 47.1% of them are urbanite.

Table 2 : distribution of respondents by their socio-demographic profile

Characteristics	Response	Frequency	%	characteristics	Response	Frequency	%
Sex	Male	115	47.9	Place of Residence	Rural	126	52.5
	Female	125	52.1		Urban	112	46.7
	Total	240	100		Missing	2	0.8
Age	20-30	58	24.2		Total	240	100
	31-40	93	38.8	Wereda	Jimma	52	21.7
	41-50	55	22.9		Agaro	61	25.4
	51-60	31	12.9		Dedo	70	29.2
	61-70	3	1.3		Omonada	57	23.8
Total	240	100	Total		240	100.0	
Religious Affiliation	Orthodox	33	13.8	Educational status	can't read and write	85	35.4
	Muslim	186	77.5		can read and write	51	22.1
	Protestant	13	5.4		primary school	54	22.5
	Catholic	6	2.5		secondary school	22	9.2
	Missing	2	0.8		tertiary school and above	26	10.8
	Total	240	100		Total	238	99.2
Employment status	self-employed	31	12.9		Missing	2	0.8
	Go/Ngo/Private sector employed	30	12.5	Employment status	Farming	73	30.4
	Daily labourer	26	10.8		Other (petty trade, support from others, etc.)	23	9.6
	Unemployed	9	3.8		Total	234	97.5
	Housewife	42	17.5		Missing	6	2.5

With respect to the qualitative aspect of the study, different offices working on the issue under scrutiny and key personalities were considered in this particular study. Accordingly, four key informants from women and children affairs, four key informants injustice office, and four elderly were included in the study.

b) *Level of Marital Satisfaction*

To determine/measure the level of marital satisfaction of respondents, a Likert scale was prepared;

having a couple of questions (10 items with a possible minimum score of 10 and a maximum of 40) within it and to rate their own marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire was duly checked. The following table is all about this issue.

Table 3 : Level of Marital Satisfaction of survey participants

level of marital satisfaction	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Self-rate	Frequency	Percent
	25	15	40	25.58	high	62	25.8
					moderate	125	52.1
					Low	30	12.5
					Total	217	90.4
					Missing	23	9.6
					Total	240	100.0

Assessing marital satisfaction in research is often done through self-report surveys, in which participants respond to a variety of questions assessing their satisfaction with different facets of their marriage. The concept of marital satisfaction is not necessarily gauged by assessing a lack of dissatisfaction in the relationship; factors that lead to marital distress are not necessarily the inverse of factors that promote satisfying relationships. Factors that promote healthy relationships and are present in satisfying, long-term marriages are important to consider, as well. Thus, thorough measures of marital satisfaction assess qualities that contribute negatively, as well as uniquely positively, to the marriage (Stone and Shackelford, 2007). In this particular study, with 10 items of Likert scale, the level of marital satisfaction of respondents was evaluated. Subsequently, the mean level of marital satisfaction was 25.58 with standard deviation of 4.4 and range of 29. Respondents were also asked to rate their own marital satisfaction. The result shows that 28% of them have

high satisfaction in their marital relationship. The majority, 57.6% of them, have moderate satisfaction in their marital engagement and the remaining 13.8% have low satisfaction.

Various literature stipulate that some marital couples who faced marital dissatisfaction has a tendency to wish if they hadn't married. Subsequently, in the case of this study the majority 35.8% and 34.2% of married couples said that they have rarely and never wish if they hadn't married respectively. In the contrary, 12.1% of them frequently wish if they hadn't married whereas 17.9% of them replied they occasionally wish if they hadn't engaged in marital relationship. One way ANOVA result also depict the existence of a statistically significant difference in marital satisfaction among the respondents who occasionally, frequently, rarely and never feel if they hadn't married (F=64.941 and alpha=0.000). The post hoc test too shows the difference is significant between each group. For more information, it is better to look the subsequent table.

Table 4 : Respondents thought on their Marriage

Do you ever wish if you hadn't married?	Frequency	%	ANOVA (within & Between groups)	
			F	Sig.
Frequently	29	12.1	64941	0.000
Occasionally	43	17.9		
Rarely	86	35.8		
Never	82	34.2		
Total	240	100.0		

Knowing the intention of married couples concerning their decision if their current relationship is over is one way of checking their marital dis/satisfaction. Accordingly, as clearly manifested on the table below, 40% of the surveyed responded that they are not

interested to marry at all; 35% would marry the same person; and the remaining 24.6% would marry a different person. This clearly stipulates the majority of the participants (about 65%) are not pleased with their current marital relationship.

Table 5 : Respondents' decision if their life to live over

If you had your life to live over, do you think you would...	Frequency	Percent
marry the same person	84	35.0
marry a different person	59	24.6
not marry at all	97	40.4
Total	240	100.0

c) Marital dissatisfaction and Divorce

Some literatures support the argument that marital dissatisfaction may end up with divorce. In this regard, as shown on the upcoming table, 53.3% of the

participants replied high level of marital dissatisfaction potentially lead to divorce and the remaining 46.7% were skeptical with the notion that marital dissatisfaction leads to divorce. Similarly, an elderly from Dedo Wereda

stated that marital dissatisfaction rarely leads to divorce. In parental arranged and religious marriage, spouses are tied together till to their life span except especial

cases are happened. They stay together in all ups and downs of life and during both happiness and sadness.

Table 6 : The nexus between marital dissatisfaction and divorce

Does marital dissatisfaction leads to divorce?	Frequency	%
Yes	128	53.3
No	112	46.7
Total	240	100

Unlike the above contradicting evidences, qualitative evidences underscored the prevalence of probabilities in which marital dissatisfaction leads to end up ones marital relationship. In this respect, most informants indicated that marital dissatisfaction may provoke continuous spouse violence/abuse, absence of love, sexual incompatibility, physical injury, unable to fulfil basic necessities and expected roles to play, inability to resolve their disagreement through council of elders and ultimately these factors may lead the couples to fall in conflict and finally lead them to dissolution of their marriage. An informant in Agaro Justice Office

detailed the way on how marital dissatisfaction leads to divorce as follows:

*Divorce stems from marital dissatisfaction. If there is no love among couples with respect to sex interest, economy, health, and social status of husband, there is high probability of divorce. In addition, if there is always disagreement between spouses, they may go to court and end up in marital dissolution. However, all disputes doesn't necessary leads to divorce.*

*Coping strategies of couples for marital dissatisfaction  
Common types of coping Mechanisms*

Table 8 : Distribution of respondents by coping mechanisms

Coping strategies	Responses		% of Cases
	N	%	
Negotiating each other	122	23.6%	50.8%
Presenting our issue to elders	175	33.8%	72.9%
Presenting our issue to kebele shengo/women affairs	37	7.1%	15.4%
By informing to family/relatives/friends	79	15.3%	32.9%
Present to court	73	14.1%	30.4%
Discussing with neighbourhood	32	6.2%	13.3%
Total	518	100.0%	215.8%

\*\*\*multiple response analysis

Couples, in the study area, manage their marital dissatisfaction by deploying various mechanisms. presenting to elders (*Jaarsummaa*) is the major way of addressing their marital dissatisfaction in which 33.6% of the respondents use it followed by negotiating each other (23.6%). 15.3%, 14.1%, 7.1%, and 6.2% attempted to manage their marital unhappiness through informing to families/relatives/friends, present to court, presenting to kebele shengo/women affairs and discussing neighborhood respectively.

The qualitative wing of the study has also revealed the same. One of the key informant Dedo Wereda justice office stated that:

*In most cases couples resolve their marital dissatisfaction with mutual discussion. This is because couples want to sustain their life by looking their children and they do not want to exposé their issues to other person. Hence, although disagreement is normal between couples, they compromise their disputes and lead their life in normal way. However, there are situations in which*

*couples expose their issues (disputes) to council elders.*

d) *The role of elders in managing Marital Dissatisfaction*

As it is understood from the qualitative data, from key informants, elders, all most anywhere, are popular and knowledgeable people in society. They give decision by looking who is most affected, who should be compensated, who should be punished, what is the cause of the problem, how couples bind together and sustain their life, providing counseling and making couples understood the adverse implication of divorce Through these, elders mostly capitalize a conducive social environment among couples. In the case of resolving marital dissatisfaction among couples elders arbitrate dissatisfied couples, strengthen the bonds of couples and reunify if couples are separated. An elder in Omo Nada clearly stipulates the role of elders in managing marital discontent as follows:

*...besides, elder's creates positive image in the minds of both husband and wife. They influence them to forget their past grievances (disputes).*

*Elders are considered as influential mediators. Hence, disrespecting elders implies disrespecting father & may expose one to curse as a result of disobedience. Therefore, their attitude and opinions are respected. In general, they have a power to influence and convince the disputing couples in terminating their dissatisfaction.*

The other key informant in Jimma Zone court also reveals the same with different words. He stated that:

*...elders have a great role in resolving disputes among couples through early intervention. That means before couple appeal their causes to the court office. Additionally, they also play a role after the couple appeals their case to the courts. For instance, after application, court gives three months for the disputing couples which are known as cooling period. In this period, elders see the grievance between couple, and then they discuss the root causes of disputes. And create mutual agreement between them (couples). This in turn provide a way for re- solving the disputes of couples. However, it has its own weakness in that elders pressurize women to accept their discussion in favor of men. In this case, there is a sort bias towards men.*

From the data we can witness that elders are doing a pivotal role in handling marital dissatisfaction and restore it in to normal conditions. But, most of the key informants stated that elders are always in favor of the husband. Wives are expected to get silent with the decisions of elders and act accordingly though the decision is quite inconsistent to them/wives.

Couples also resolve their marital dissatisfaction with open discussion with their marital partner. From the key informants it was understood that couples settle their marital unhappiness by discussing to gather rather than through 3<sup>rd</sup> parties because they do not want to expose their secret and do not want to intervention of other people. An Elder in Omo Nada Wereda stated that "couples resolve their disputes in open way without disclosing it to other entity because they do not want to apart from each other and do not expose their children as well as themselves to different problems."

A prosecutor in Dedo Wereda Court office also underscored the same. He stated that:

*In most cases couples resolve their marital dissatisfaction with mutual discussion. This because, couples want to sustain their life by looking their children and they do not want to exposé their issues to other person. Hence, although disagreement is normal between couples, they compromise their disputes and lead their life in normal way. However there are a situation in which couples expose their issues (disputes) to council elders.*

Unlike others a key informant in Agaro Justice Office underscored the absence of open discussion among couples. In his own words "...couples don't openly discuss and give solutions for their problems. Had couples have open discussions, case would never come to court and divorce could reduce. But in contrary, it is increasing and implies the existence of communication gap among couples." Moreover, it was understood that minor conflict could only be resolved through discussing to gather.

#### IV. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

##### a) Conclusion

Based on major findings of the study, the following concluding remarks were drawn.

- The study indicated that it is only 28% of the surveyed participants who are endowed with high marital satisfaction. From this it could be easily grasped that significant portions of couples experienced a sort of dissatisfaction and hesitation (something remains) in their marital relationship.
- The thesis that marital dissatisfaction will lead to divorce is still indefinite as per the evidences of this study. There are situations at which marital discontent compel couples to resort marital dissolution while not in other contexts.
- Couples who are discontented in their marital relationship use outlets like negotiating each other, interference of family members or beloved ones, presenting their issues e to elders, Kebele Shengo or women affairs, and finally to court.
- From literatures it was understood social workers, psychologists and family and marriage counsellors execute varied social services and assistance to improve the social and psychological functioning of families and marital partners. Many social workers are working in family consulting centers and social work clinics to help family members understand their relationships and roles in the family. Social workers work with the family to establish a healthy family dynamics, communication, and behavior patterns among family members (Rostami 2013). In this study, such functions and outlets for couples failed to exist.

##### b) Implications of the Study and Recommended Actions

- This study has proven the absence of family and marriage counselors and no one resort to get service from these professionals. The call for marriage and family therapist is a timely issue and professional in the area has to be produced to grapple the emerging challenges of the family institution.

- An ongoing awareness creation on the significance and pertinence of love based marriage has to be made in the area.
- Religious heterogamy is one of the scenario which is experienced in urban settings. A detailed qualitative inquiry need to be done concerning the patterns and marital satisfaction of such marriage typology.

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