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# The Impact of Cultural Practices on Women Empowerment: The Case of Offa Woreda, Wolaita Zone, Southern Ethiopia

**Mesele Woldemichael Delango**

Department of Civics and Ethical Studies, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Wolaita Soddo University, Wolaita Soddo, Ethiopia

**Email address:**

meselew.michael@yahoo.com

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**Abstract:** The objective of this research is to investigate the impacts of cultural practices on women empowerment in Offa Woreda, Wolaita zone, of southern Ethiopia. This study design is purely qualitative and descriptive in its approach. Both primary and secondary source of data for this study was obtained from Offa Woreda women who are engaged in different economic activities. Hence, the geographical scope of the study contained Busha and wachiga-Eesho kebeles of Offa Woreda. Since the study aimed at getting in-depth understanding of community practices that affect women's empowerment, purposive sampling technique was employed to select study participants. Totally fifty individuals were participated to provide the data for this research. In-depth interview and focus group discussion was also used to collect the data. The researcher documented and analyzed actual case studies, which enabled the researcher to identify the impacts of socio-cultural practices on women's empowerment, the society's perception towards women role and factors affect women decision making in household and community level. The data was analyzed in thematically organized way by pursuing to the original descriptions of the field notes so as to infer meanings and generalizations. This finding reveals that our countries context is formally banned by the Ethiopian constitution which was promulgated in Ethiopian constitution (1995) Art 35, sub Art 4 the state shall enforce the right of women to eliminate the influence of harmful customs. Though, the community has been practicing female genital mutilation and early marriage because of low awareness and cultural reason like the belief that a non-mutilated girl breaks the utensils, possesses bad behavior and for the purpose of purity. Generally, there are several cultural practices in this study area and they have their own impact on women's performance. Currently, these practices are prevailing among the community and the community gave their own positive and negative implications towards this practices. Particularly female genital mutilation and early marriage are the most common practice in my study area. Therefore, it needs governments' considerable attention and other non-governmental organizations and policy-makers to reflect on the most suitable ways of supporting women empowerment.

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Early Marriage, Cultural Practices, Female Genital Mutilation, Women Decision Making Process

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## 1. Introduction

Empowerment can also be seen as an important process in reaching gender equality, which is understood to mean that the "rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female" [20]. In Millennium Development Goal Gender equality and the empowerment of women placed high on the development agenda to promote gender equality [66]. The Millennium Declaration also added that the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women in addition to being a goal

in itself is also a means for further development goals to eliminate poverty, hunger and diseases [67]. This signals that women empowerment has paramount role in the development plans of a country. Women's socio-cultural empowerment cannot be complete without their equitable participation in family matters. Women have special role to play in the family decisions. (Ibid)

An Ethiopian female from her birth, in most families is of lower status and commands little respect relative to her brothers and male counterparts. As soon as she is able, she forced to do all housework. As she grows older, she is valued

for the role she will play in establishing kinship bonds through marriage to another family, thereby strengthening the community status of her family. Given the heavy workload imposed on girls at an early age, early marriage without choice erodes her self-confidence and decision making capacity [69].

Ethiopian women are especially vulnerable to harmful traditional practices (HTPs) such as early marriage, abductions and forced marriages, and female genital mutilation, as well as economic, physical, psychological, and sexual violence. Moreover, this causes great challenge on women Empowerment and the problems are also similar in wolaita community [11].

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

Women in much of the world lack support for fundamental functions of a human life. They are not well-nourished compared to men, less healthy, more vulnerable to physical violence and sexual abuse. They are much less likely than men to be literate, and still less likely to have pre professional or technical education [45]. African societies also happen to be highly patriarchal. Contends that it decision-making positions remain predominantly male domains in Africa. There is a historical reason to account for this state: most political decisions in traditional societies took place at the household and community levels. In these contexts," women and men were organized separately, with women involved in decision-making within the household only and men on issues that concerned the relation of the household to the outside world." in Republic of Kenya. This demarcation of roles meant that from the outset, women were excluded from taking decision-making positions in the public domain" Ibid.

Most of the customary laws and practices in Ethiopia reflect discriminatory practices. Some consider the husband as the head of the family, therefore, in cases of disputes the family arbitrators, disregarding the voice of the wife, usually listen only to the husband [3]. As it is prevalent among the Gurage in SNNPR, women are excluded from attending customary proceedings and the society has traditionally been strongly male oriented. Here also similarly women are not allowed to attend traditional assemblies they cannot even bring their own claims before them. Claims must be raised on their behalf by male relatives. Besides these, the wolaita community take different measures to keep females silent and to influence their decision making power by recognizing males supremacy by the expense of females to prove this reality currently, female genital mutilation (FGM) is one of harmful traditional practice deep-rooted in the area and violate women's right.

The current researcher's study area is one of the districts of Wolaita zone and birth place for the researcher. In fact, when the researcher grow up in this community he remembers his child time still now there are considerable gender disparities between men and women or women's are not equally participating in all aspects of life as men. Moreover, there are several cultural practices which affect women empowerment

among the community. Generally, this study deals with cultural a practice that hinders women empowerment in social, economic and political aspects in Wolaita community southern Ethiopia.

### **1.2. Objectives of the Study**

#### *General Objective*

To investigate the impacts of cultural practices on women empowerment in Offa Woreda, of Wolaita zone, southern Ethiopia.

#### *Specific Objective*

1. To explain the cultural practices that affect women empowerment.
2. To elucidate the perception of the community towards cultural practices that affect women empowerment.
3. To evaluate the role of women indecision making
4. To understand the role of women in economic activities.
5. To explain the temporal changes occurring in community's perception about the changing roles of women in Wolaita community.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

1. What are cultural practices that affect women empowerment?
2. What are the perceptions of community towards socio-cultural practices that affect woman empowerment?
3. How do woman participate in decision making process?
4. What is the role of women in economic activities?
5. What are the temporal changes occurring in community's perception about the changing roles of women in Wolaita community?

### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

In the first place the finding of this study exposes the cultural practices which affect women empowerment. This study is believed to feed the information to policy makers to curtail cultural practices which are harmful for women development in Ethiopia in general and the study zone in particular. It helps the government, non-governmental and fund raising organization to reduce the alarming and increasing problem of women. This study is brings to show the significant contribution in empowerment to the socio- economic well-being of women. Furthermore, the study gives better insight to gender issue and to ensure women's equal access to political position, education, employment, health etc.

### **1.5. Scope of the Study**

Regarding the area of investigation, this study is delimited to find out and analyze cultural practices which affect women's empowerment and to examine the changes occurring in community's perception towards women's role in Wolaita Zone Offa Woreda.

### **1.6. Limitation of the Study**

In-depth investigations were not made in the Offa Woreda,

wolaita zone southern Ethiopia on the impacts of cultural practice on women empowerment. Therefore shortage of written materials, reference books and documentation to get appropriate empirical review literature to the study, time and financial constraints highly challenged the researcher's work at different level but these constraints did not force to stop work. Rather facilitated to search another way to get available data for the research.

### **1.7. Ethical Consideration**

In this research all ethical issues of the research were kept. Before getting to the field, permission on to conduct the research was obtained from Offa Woreda administration. Also, informed consent was sought from the research participants. To maintain privacy and confidentiality pseudonyms were used. This implies that all the time the researcher gave priority for the comfort and interest of the informants such as respecting their norms, keeping their secrets in confidential way, by interviewing in their home or near to home.

### **1.8. Organization of the Study**

This research is structured as follows: section one presents the introduction part, statement of the problem, objectives of the study and limitation of the study. The second section presents the research methodology, the third section presents about results and discussion and the last section presents conclusion and recommendation of the research.

## **2. The Research Methodology**

In this part the researcher tried to mention the research methodology- including the research design, data collection techniques and tools and analysis methods which have been used to carry out this research and they are listed and discussed briefly below.

### **2.1. Study Design**

This study design is purely qualitative and descriptive in its approach. This helps to understand "the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants and hence, in this study, it is employed to gain a better understanding of the impacts of socio cultural practices on women's empowerment from the participants' perspective.

### **2.2. Population and Sampling Techniques**

The data for this study was obtained from Offa Woreda women who are engaged in different economic activities. *Busha* and *wachiga-Eesho* kebeles of Offa Woreda were purposively selected because the areas predominantly practice harmful traditional practices which affect women's empowerment, such as female genital mutilation, early marriage, polygamy, abduction, are some of the reasons which facilitated him to conduct the research on these areas.

Since the study aimed at getting in-depth understanding of

community practices that affect women's empowerment, fifty individuals who have deep knowledge about the impact of cultural practices were selected by purposive sampling to provide the data for this research, these were elder women, Kebele officers, girls, house wives.

### **2.3. Data Collection Tools**

To answer the research questions designed in this inquiry, four qualitative data collection tools: interview, focus group discussion, observation and case study were used.

#### **2.3.1. Interview**

In-depth interview were conducted with elder women's, government officers, girl children and house wives who were selected based on their age, profession, experience, knowledge, social status and acceptance among the society.

#### **2.3.2. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)**

FGD helped me to draw information about to what extent the Woreda women affairs office, the culture and information department and the kebele women's affairs office work together to avoid those cultural practices which are hinder women empowerment and dynamics of change in the process of those socio-cultural practices.

#### **2.3.3. Observation**

The researcher observed community meetings to know in which issues women's participate and on which issues they do not. In addition to this, the researcher communicated with married and unmarried women's and observed who work in two kebeles in order to understand in which issues they make decision and in which issues they expect their husbands to make decision and what problems faced them particularly in line with gender in household decision making. During this time the observation was supported by writing notes, photographs and voice recording.

#### **2.3.4. Case Study**

The researcher documented and analyzed actual cases studies, which enabled the researcher to identify the impacts of socio- cultural practices on women's empowerment, the society's perception towards women role and factors affect women decision making in household and community level.

### **2.4. Sources of Data**

Both primary and secondary source of data was used in this research.

#### **2.4.1. Primary Data**

The primary data was obtained through in-depth interview, focus group discussion, observation and case study.

#### **2.4.2. Secondary Data**

The researcher was reviewed pertinent secondary data from relevant library sources collected from books, journals and proceedings and other published and unpublished materials written on the impacts of socio cultural practices on women's empowerment.

### 2.5. Data Analysis

After collecting the necessary data, it was categorized, combined, synthesized and thereby analyzed the collected data. Before the actual analysis of the data, the collected data was sorted and categorized in accordance to its source and type. Above all, the whole collected data was analyzed in thematically organized way by pursuing to the original descriptions of the field notes so as to infer meanings and generalizations.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Major Cultural Practices and Their Impact on Women Empowerment Among Wolaita Community

This is briefly discussed under the following sub-headings.

#### 3.1.1. Cultural Practices Associated with the Status of Women

Among wolaita community there are several cultural practices associated to the status of women, such as polygamy, abduction, early marriage and female genital mutilation. These are most known and deep rooted cultural practices in the community.

#### 3.1.2. Polygamy and the Status of Women

As stated by most of the informants from the very beginning polygamy is a common among wolaita community. They listed two basic justifications for the preference of polygamy. The First reason is the son preference or husband's wrong perception towards girls or giving lower status for girl child. The second reason is levirate marriage is a type of marriage in which the brother of a deceased man is obliged to marry his brother's widow. The traditional wolaita culture enforces the brother of the deceased to marry his widow without his consent, whether formerly he had wife or not.

According to one of my elder women informants, the above mentioned two reasons are the basic reasons to accept the polygamy as tradition. Recalling her past memories- elder women informant expressed the impact of cultural practices on women; the informant expressed as follows:

*"kasse wodetun macca asaasi maati baynagaa macca asay qonccisidi zaretidikka ubba wode macca asay banta azina shenyan di'yogaa qonccissidossana gidoppe attin macca assay xalttaamidi banta azina shiniyappe kiyiyo hannotayka de'es gidoppe attin wolaita wogay azinay ba maccasiyo seranawu maata immees hegaasi azinay wadhiyogan ba maccasiyo seeres" this is equivalent with English meaning;*

"In the past females are considered as subject or She has no right to give decision on whatever issues she is subjected to her husband's interest unless she faces severe physical violence from her husband".

Wolaita proverbially depict this long-lived traditional and negative orientation of femininity saying, in local language.

*"Hariyanne maccaasawu dullay koshshees" this is equivalent with English meaning;*

'Females and donkeys deserve ill treatment through kicking'.

To sum up, my informants briefly explained the impacts of the above two reasons of polygamy on women's performance as firstly, polygamy causes disagreement among the children's of the former wife and the new ones because of the different case like the struggle of the two groups to control these common resources causes the serious conflict and my result in life lose within the family. Currently, the communities have awareness about the disadvantages of polygamy and how it affects women's right.

#### 3.1.3. Abduction and the Status of Women

As informants stated that during abduction if she made any struggle with the abductors they will use force to attack her. It also causes psychological problems on abducted girls due to the challenge associated with taking a new role for which she has no preparation. On top of these local cultures enforces the women to live with her abductor whether she likes or not since it is taboo to be divorced. In rare case she may divorce by refusing the marriage.

The elder women informant also expressed the life of abducted girl by saying:

*"Wolaita woggan Azinay birshido macca nanyiya am'e getetiyo gishatas Itin kehinka bagellido azinara de'ana mala ooteles" this is equivalent with English meaning;* "She has no choice to expel from this boring life and accept this marriage in spite of all the challenges".

Due to this, the abducted girls experience the life in which there is no peace and love. In spite of her marriage is full of depression so always she thinks to take rest from this boring life situation by returning to her family as the only choice but she fears to the community's subordination if she thinks to remain with her family on her way.

According to elder women informant explained that if the abducted girl came to her family in case of disagreement she exposed to different form of punishment from the community such as denied to wash her body, to cut her finger nails, to interact with other people and in this way she was totally isolated. If she fails to do this and beautify herself (prepare herself for another marriage) this action may disappoint her former husband and he plan to hurt the women.

*"Ba machiyo seerena Azina heran asay karees woykko laffa asaadan qodetees hegasi wolaita wogan azinay ba machiyo seerana mala azinantaso aaway nne aaya banta naa zorooson". This is equivalent with English meaning;* "In such situation if anyone asks him why does he bit her, his response is that 'she is my wife and I claim that I have right to do so".

Additionally, my informant expressed the lower status which attached to women's like considering women's as the weak and inferior creatures and that man was inherently superior to women, that men have a right to correct her behavior in different ways like harsh punishments such as beating in public place is accepted as an appropriate way to discipline the women. Moreover, one my elder women informant briefly explained the change in the community by saying that, our community have awareness about the weak

sides of abduction and its impacts on women's empowerment and they suggested to the stake holders to do further in the area because now a day, the problem is not eradicated all in all.

### 3.2. Female Genital Mutilation

As stated by my informants including female students and house wife informants respectively female genital mutilation causes both educational and health problems on females. To understand the impacts of female genital mutilation on girls' education, the researcher has conducted interview with two groups of female students. At the time of interview the informants were interviewed individually at different time in a very secret manner. The need of making it secret is necessitated by the nature of the issue which is formally prohibited by the international convention and national law with a basic justification it violates women's right. Accordingly, one of mutilated 15 years old student from grade 8 expressed her view emotionally by saying that "*Macca naatu kaxaray keehippe sakiyaba*" this is equivalent with English meaning; "I have no words to express the pain of genital mutilation, it is very painful." She added that:

#### CASE-1

*I remember that three years ago when I was grade 5 my family mutilated me according to the local culture. At that time my body bleeds excessively and I felt sick almost for two months without any change. Later I was forced to stop my education for one year. I was left behind from my batch students. The situation disturbed me and as the result I didn't no feel good in my education and when I see my batch students I always remember the day of mutilation. FGM put unforgettable scar in my life because I departed from my batch and started attending with my junior students Despite the fact that I have been experienced psychological instability and developed inferiority complex in my life when I compared myself with my batch students. The situation finally resulted in lower academic achievement in my education.*

One of the elder women informant expressed at the time of interview that, the practice was valued by the community since it is considered as a manifestation of cleanliness, beauty and important criteria to get marriage partner. Sometimes the wolaita community considers that mutilation is best way to preserve virginity. In fact virginity has great value and sometimes very necessary for marriage proposal, so the community takes mutilation as the only chance to preserve their daughters' virginity. Because culturally they belief that mutilation decreases the interest of girls for sexual intercourse and always the mutilated girl preserve virginity until their wedding day. Culturally virgin girls are a proud for her family but a girl who lost her virginity before marriage girls a shame for her family. In addition to this, some girls who are interested to get mutilation were interviewed on how much it painful in fact they are is forced to get mutilation because the local culture highly subordinate who are not mutilated. So the informant started her conversation by saying,

*"Ta miche macca asaa kaxaray keehippe kehippe sakiyanne macca naatu bolli gita metuwa gatiyooga malla dumma dumma oduwa pultotuppe siyas gidoppe atin wolaita woggan kaxxaray attenaba hegasi tannika ha qattara gallasa gita yashan kumada nagayssi"* this is equivalent with English meaning;

"Oh! My sister, FGM is very shocking and painful action which causes several health problems on female children as I have heard from my friends and different media. Personally, I have no way to escape from genital mutilation. So I'm waiting for my turn with very trouble feeling" and recalled the following fact:

#### CASE-2

*She begins the story with crying and heart breaking words by saying.*

*I always afraid when I have been with my friends and I'm not confident enough as my friend In case if they laugh each other immediately I relate the issue with me and I became ashamed. This is because I was not mutilated and my classmates consider me as unclean or have bad smell. I am facing great challenges from them. I remember one day when I was doing group work with my friends and unfortunately the room possessed unpleasant smell. At that time immediately my friends stopped the group work and all of them put their hands on their nose and started whispering by saying she is not mutilated and she may possess bad smell. Then I was very disappointed and left the group work and returned to home at a time of my arrival when my mother has been preparing food for a lunch. I immediately got in to my room and begin crying. She heard my voice and she was very confused in my action and began to let me calm down and requested me to tell her what happened to me. At that time I was unable to control my emotion and started crying loudly as before by saying from today's onward I would not go to school. You made me to shame in front of my friends and you are not good mother. Then my mother was shocked and said tell me my dear how am I made you shame. Later me express my feeling with noisy sound by saying when we were doing group work with my class mates unfortunately the class has possessed unpleasant smell and they talked to each other in low voice and referred to me as if I possess bad smell because of not being mutilated. After that my mother's eyes also fulfilled with tear and she hugs me and said I am not forgetting it, I was planning to mutilate you on this summer when the class ended. At that time I'm very happy in my mother's idea and continued my class until the end of class without caring my friends insult".*

From the above case we can understand that genital mutilation is considered as one criterion to have harmonious relation with others. Most of my house wife informants recognized that the community considered female genital mutilation as a manifestation of beauty and cleanness. In addition to this, most of the elder women who has been participated in FGD discussants stated that in fact most of our cultural practices directly or indirectly affect women's performance. Despite this, we cannot avoid this practices simply because these practices have been stayed with us for a

long periods highly valued by our community. We have inherited it from our fore fathers and mothers and after all it is our culture. Even though, we do not consider these practices as an acceptable we have been practicing it since it is social norm. This norm is very deep-rooted in our culture and transmitted from generation to generation.

Lastly, one of the informant explained her heart felt emotion by her local language, "*Macca naatu kaxxara issikutan xaysanaage kehiippe deexo woykko danddayetenanabba gidiyooga michiya hagaadan qonciasu beni woode macca naata qoncciyen dabuwa lagiya xeesidi qaxarees ha*" i wode qassi qossan qaxxarees" this is equivalent with English meaning; "Eradicating FGM is very complex issue" and she explained the change ironically the informant expressed that the only change in FGM is "in past people do in common way with great festivity but in currently they do in secret way. "This implies that currently the communities are performing FGM in a secret way". Because in current time there is punishment if someone mutilate her/his daughter. The punishment followed by (500 Ethiopian birr or the penalty is minimum 3 year). This is banned in the constitution and the criminal code of the country. However, this is not fully applicable in our area, and it is only written on paper. My informants expressed as earlier only written rules are not enough to eradicate such type of deep rooted practices simply.

### 3.3. Early Marriage and the Status of Women

As the informants said most of the times they advise and mentor their daughters to take care their virginity to get acceptance among her husband. Culturally they express the situation by saying. "*Macca na'a yelidda aaya ubba wodekka hirgan de'awus*" this is equivalent with English meaning; "Girls family has always live in suspicion" For instance they think just like that someone may rape or abduct their daughter and simultaneously loss money paid for them in the form of bride prices.

Beyond that there is a belief that if a daughter does not marry in her puberty time she may loss marriage and culturally this is a great shame for girl's family. So they express this in the local language "*Eqqa Ataasu*" this is equivalent with the English meaning she stayed long time without marriage or she has no chance for marriage.

Having a massive farmland, cattle and having public acceptance are some of the criteria have to give their daughter to a certain man. Latter in FGD most of the informants raised different idea about the impacts of the families low economic status on girl's performance and this early marriage causes inferiority complex and results in low performance in her all aspects of life. In addition to this, early marriage may cause disagreement among couples, and this result in divorce. According to wolaita culture being divorced is very shameful action and divorced wife has a very low opportunity to marry another husband. In spite the daughter decide to live her life time without any love and respect this drowns girl's confidence and causes inferiority.

Moreover, most of house wife informants in FGD

discussants said most of the time in early marriage there is age variation between couples or the husband is older than wife. This implies that most of the issues were decided by husband and wife has no power to do anything. And my informant expressed the situation in rhetoric way by saying that the relation between husband and wife in traditional wolaita is just like "land lord system" she work more than her husband but she has a very limited share in resource and wife have no equal right with her husband to buy and sell materials or she have possession right in limited way and always his interest is restricted by her husband. Thus, this all cumulative effects result girl 'sin inferiority and low performance.

In addition to this, one of my informants from female student group explained the current situation of girl's education by saying:

"*Nu heran macca naata tamarissidi xoqqa xekkaa gattanage keehi wayissiyaba. Macca naatti tamaridi gita xekaa gakkena mala ootiyabati de'osona hagetikka herra asay macca naatussi immiyo sohuwa, misha mettuwa nne macca natti bantaw immiyo sohuwa*" this is equivalent with English meaning:

"In our area educating girls until the destiny is very challenging because she has so many barriers to continue her education until higher institutions such as communities' perception, economic problem, and girl's perception towards their capability". This may result in low achievement of female in education which in turn significantly results in high female drop out in school before completing elementary education.

Lastly, one of the elder women from the community was interviewed regarding early marriage and why the community performs the practice. The informant started her dialogue with very complicated feeling by saying:

"*Nuni ubaykka nu macca naata tamarissidi xoqqa teka gattanaw kosshay xayina gidenna. Macca naatti nu heeran timmiriya ziqqa xekkan qanxidi katamaa heera oosuwa koshawu biyogenne layttay gakkennan azina geliyoge eretidaba hegasikka gaasoy so assay macca nattu koshaa kuntana dandayennagaa*" this is equivalent with English meaning;

*We all have interest to educate our daughters or we do our best to continue until higher institutions though they drop in elementary school. In spite the daughter take early marriage as the only choice and she decide to marry at early age because the family does not fulfill her needs.*

In this case, whatever interest she has, the girl cannot be allowed to continue her education, and the family too advises her to marry at earlier age because of economic problem.

The following is the case related to early marriage She was very emotional during the interview and vivid the following reality:

#### CASE-3

*She opened the dialogue by crying. She said that that I lost my pretty girl because of economic problem I am unable to fulfill her needs while she was disappointed and planned to migrate to urban area for better life. Later, I heard this from*

her friends, and I planned to escape her in way. Hence, I advised her in a very systematic way about the disadvantages of migration and later she accepted my advice and started living with us but she can't go further in this situation and said to her "my mother you have no money to fulfill my needs and what is wrong if I go to better cities try my chance to fulfill my needs?" Later I disagreed with her idea and advised her to marry our neighbor who is older than her. Soon after, she accepted the marriage, forced her to live with her husband when she is 13 years old and got pregnant at the age of 14. Completing her 9-month pregnancy was the most difficult experience for her. She was still a child and needed parental care and attention but at that early age, she was given the responsibility of motherhood. At the end of her pregnancy, she was in prolonged labor for 4 days in Offa district health center on the 5th day she was very weak and she was taken to wolaita Soddo Hospital where she was operated upon and had a stillbirth. In addition, her uterus was ruptured and surgically removed. As a result, of the complications of prolonged labor, she also had a ruptured bladder and could no longer control her urine. The attending physician referred her to Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital for better management of this condition. At the end of her treatment and recovery the doctor at the hospital told her that she would never be pregnant again because of the problems that occurred as a result of the difficult labor. When she completed her treatment at the Hospital she was sent back to her village. Knowing that she could no longer have children her husband divorced her and sent her back to us. She stayed with us until she was 20 years old. At 20 years of age she went to Addis Ababa to look for a job so that she could become economically independent. She got a job as a housemaid and worked for 3 years. When she started to know the town and the people in Addis she decided to work in a hotel as a waitress. Since she was very attractive physically her friends wrongly advised her to be a prostitute. Unfortunately, she contracted the deadly disease HIV/AIDS and could no longer work in the hotel since she was very weak and sick. Finally, she decided to go back to stay within two years the Village and died after she left Addis Ababa.

From the above case, we can understand that economic problem is a facilitating factor for early marriage and cause several problems on girls health and performance.

### **3.4. The Role of Women in Economic Activities and Decision Making Processes**

This is unquestionable truth that wolaita is one of the most prosperous and fertile agricultural land area in Ethiopia. In the area, agriculture is used as economic activities for a long period of time [11].

### **3.5. The Role of Women in Economic Activities**

As stated by house wife informants expressed the life situation of girl among the community by saying that:

*"Macca naati timirtiyanninne alaxiyooogan aattiyo wodiyyape daruwa banta so asaa madiyooogan wodiyya"*

*"aatoosona". This is equivalent with English meaning;*

"When girl child grows up she carries almost all responsibilities at early age in low economic status family. Besides this, child girls have the great responsibility to feed her family". This implies that she has great responsibility to support her poor family in economy. In this case, she does not worry about her comfort rather she starts to plan to support her family. In case most of girl children in our area drop out their education at elementary level and forced to go urban area for the search of job. And the girl child's move to the urban area and other countries sides in dry season to look for job because the dry season is a very challenging time for this area and food scarcity is common in this case the girls migrated to urban area for the searching of work and employed as home maid. In this time, the girls face great challenges from their employers. Such as, demoralization, high workloads, harsh physical punishment and sexual abuse are common.

Latter another informant from the FGD supported the elder women idea and said that cultural and economic problems are the major ones to hinder girl's performance In addition to this, she feels inferiority in all aspects of life, this effects result in low performance of women in economic activities. Hence, the government and stake holders gave awareness creation education to change the communities' perception on women's economic role.

### **3.6. Women's Level of Participation in Decision Making Process**

Most of house wives in their FGD briefly explained the community's perception towards women's decision making capability by saying in wolaita culture the community does not give a chance to woman to decide on issues only by herself. The reason is always the community perceive that women's are not capable to make right decision and always they supported by men's or men's gave directions to women's to make right decision. Generally, this drowns women's decision making capability and self-confidence. In addition to this my informant said that the government and stake holders go further to improve women's decision making capability at all level by educating the community.

### **3.7. Changes of Community's Perception on Women's Role**

Traditionally among wolaita community attending community meeting with women is considered as insult for me. In line with this, another elder women informant from FGD said that women's poorly participate in community meeting or their participation is very low because of communities negative implications or saying towards participating women in community meeting like *"xalttaama maca asa"* this equivalent with English meaning "impolite girl or a woman who have no respect for her husband". Moreover, most of my informants raised throughout the discussion the low awareness of the community about the women's role and raised the inadequate support of the stakeholders and even their support is only for urban area and

other stakeholders have low closeness with kebeles.

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter is the last section of this thesis and it has two sections, that conclusion and recommendations.

### 4.1. Conclusion

Women's empowerment is the process by which women gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. Such as economic, social and political spheres to ensure sustainable and long lasting development. Even if their participation is hindered by different cultural practices, the sources show that women take the lower social ladder in the societies in different parts of the world because of male domination, and also most of the researchers including anthropologists who had long been studying women were males projecting masculine impression on women. Similarly, in this study the wolaita community take different measures to keep females silent and to influence their decision making power by recognizing males supremacy by the expense of females to prove this reality know a day FGM is one of harmful traditional practice deep-rooted in the area and violate women's right.

As the data obtained through interview, observation, focus group discussion depict that polygamy and the status of women, Abduction and the status of women, female genital mutilation and the status of women and early marriage and the status of women. In the researcher's area, these practices impede women education and health. The wolaita community gave priority for son rather daughters and patriarchal society as stated in throughout my finding.

There are several cultural practices in this study area and they have their own impact on women's performance. Currently, these practices are prevailing among the community and the community gave their own positive and negative implications towards this practices. Particularly female genital mutilation and early marriage are the most common practice in my study area.

### 4.2. Recommendations

This study has some recommendations regarding the impacts of socio-cultural practices on women empowerment. Therefore, it needs governments' considerable attention and other non-governmental organizations and policy-makers to reflect on the most suitable ways of supporting women empowerment. The following may be the major areas of interventions.

1. To ensure the security of women along with the removal of violence against them.
2. To increase the expenditure of women education and training.
3. To raise awareness Women do not accept such practices and must challenge.
4. To give possibly to know the impact of ill health impairment due to genital mutilation.

5. Awareness creating educations should be provided by health care centers
6. To ensure the participation of women in local and international forums.
7. To ensure equal partnership of both male and female in empowerment.

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