

# Psychosocial wellbeing of children among families with parental conflict: the case of selected Kebeles in Jimma, Implication for family and marriage counselors

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**Abstract:** Parental conflict has hindered the growth and progress of many homes and children in Ethiopia. Many factors could be indicative for this disappointing situation. The study, therefore, focused on identifying psychosocial wellbeing of children among parents with marital conflict in selected kebeles of Jimma town. A descriptive research method was adopted for the study. A total number of seventy six (76) respondents were selected from Ginjo Guduru and Awetu Mendera Kebeles' of Jimma town using purposive sampling technique with the use of Focus Group discussion and interview guide to collect information from respondents who participated in the study. The data collected were carefully analyzed using narration. The finding of this study has revealed that there are six major factors for parental conflict. i.e. Money, Value conflict, Unsolved past conflict, Power struggle between husband and wife, Drug use /Bad Habit by one or both of the couple and Announcement of laws permitting marital dissolution. It was also discovered that children of parents with extreme conflict were prone to difficulties to form relation with others, poor academic achievements, lack self-confidence. It is, recommended that family counseling need to be emphasized by the stakeholders (government, religious leaders, and counselors to minimize the level of parental conflict in the family and effort should be intensified to discourage conflict that might intrude with family wellbeing.

## Introduction

In human history, people are structured and shaped by the means of production used to sustain life. The nature of means of production dictated the forms of social Organizations started from hunting gathering to the era of industrialization. Of all systems and structures, family exists as the core element of all societies past and present. Therefore, family is the basic structure that serves the main function to meet the needs and necessities of its member and society in general (Bekele, 2006).

Marriage is the socially acceptable union between a man and a woman. It means the coming together of two totally different individuals as husband and wife who agree to plan and set up their own family. Osarenren (2002) viewed marriage as usually a union

between an adult male and an adult female. Marriage is a relationship where trust is built over time as committed couples set aside their own interests for the good of their partner and develop skills for keeping the relationship positive and open.

Whenever two or more people come together, the chance of marriage conflict is bound to increase. Marital conflicts are not bad in themselves. It is our response to the conflicts that can be either helpful or harmful. Marital conflict can be the challenge to help us grow into more mature persons and a more mature relationship or it can destroy our marriages.

Marital conflict is not just a difference of opinion. Rather, it is a series of events that have been poorly handled so as to deeply damage the marriage relationship. Marriage issues have festered to the point that stubbornness, pride, anger, hurt and bitterness prevent effective marriage communication. The root of almost all serious marital discord is selfishness on the part of one or both parties. Saving a marriage means rejecting selfishness, giving up pride, forgiving hurt and setting aside bitterness; these steps grow more difficult, so it's best to avoid the downward spiral of marital conflict ( Tim and Joy, 2006).

Research on the impact of couple or inter-parental conflict on children has a long and established history (Cowan and Cowan, 2002). From as far back as the 1930s it has been recognized that discord between parents has a potentially debilitating effect on children's psychological development.

While periodic conflict between couples is natural, and something which most children will be exposed to at some point in their lives without necessarily experiencing adverse effects, couple conflict which is frequent, intense and poorly resolved is very harmful, research indicates(Harold, Pryor and Reynolds, 2001). This kind of conflict can have an effect on children of all ages. Babies as young as six months,

for example, exhibit higher physiological symptoms of distress such as elevated heart rate in response to overt, hostile exchanges between their parents when compared to exchanges between non-parental adults.

Infants and children up to the age of five years show signs of distress by crying, acting out, freezing, as well as withdrawing from or attempting to intervene in the actual conflict itself. Children between the ages of 6 and 17 years show signs of emotional and behavioral distress when exposed to ongoing, acrimonious exchanges between parents (Harold, Pryor and Reynolds, 2001).

Other research indicates that exposure to periodic conflict form of discord can manifest itself in a number of ways including increased anxiety, depression, aggression, hostility, anti-social behavior and criminality as well as deficits in academic attainment (Harold, Aitken and Shelton, 2007). Children who are exposed to more intense conflict between parents are more likely to suffer harm resulting from their parents' divorce. The lower the level of conflict between parents, the more likely those children will emerge emotionally whole (Andrew and Schepard, 2004).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Conflict exists everywhere. Conflicts exist in people's jobs, families, schools and even in the church. This can neither be avoided nor ignored. Conflict that is not managed correctly diminishes happiness and has the potential to destroy people, it leaves them broken (Mkolesia, 2004). Marital conflicts have been seen as the major causes of marital instability which often leads to divorce, desertion, single parenthood and generally failed marriages (Osarenren, Nwadinigwe and Anyama, 2013).

Family characterized with crisis, disharmony, disunity, turbulent and chaos would provide the children with frustration in life which may lead to unhappiness and loss of self concept which can make the children develop personality patterns that interfere with good adjustment and development of poor adjustment which may adversely affect them in adulthood (Osarenren, Nwadinigwe and Anyama, 2013).

The finding from Paul, Amato and Alan (1997) show that the long-term consequences of interparental discord for children are pervasive and consistently detrimental and have a broad negative impact on virtually every dimension of offspring well-being. Low parental marital quality lowers offspring well-

being, and parental divorce lowers it even further. The most important reason for working out a contentious relationship is that high conflict has far-reaching negative effects on children (Carla, Garrity and Mitchell, 1994).

Those who witness intense bitterness between their parents and are caught repeatedly in loyalty binds are at high risk for later emotional disturbance. Parental conflict interrupts many of the critical tasks of psychosocial development. It changes the nature of the parent-child relationship, creates anxiety and distress, over stimulates and frightens children, weakens parents' protective capacity, and compromises identity formation. Most of all, it leaves children powerless to do anything about it (Carla, Garrity and Mitchell, 1994). Chronic conflict causes chronic distress and agitation in children as well as a loss of emotional control. In a home marked by conflict and unpredictability, children form insecure attachments to their parents. They do not have a deep and abiding trust in their caretakers (Elizabeth and Ellis, 2000).

Exposure to inter-adult discord has significant impact on children's emotional, behavioral, interpersonal, and even physiological functioning (Mark and Patrick, 1994). How the parents fight and whether they are able to resolve their differences probably holds the key to understanding the impact of marital discord on children (Mark and Patrick, 1994). The ongoing conflict between their parents is a constant reminder to the children that their right to be loved and cared for by both parents has been irretrievably compromised (Carla and Mitchell, 1994).

Children are more likely to develop personality and behavioral problems in unhappy, unloving families in which the parents fight continually than in any other kind of family situation (Edward, 1992). Conflict between parents is a consistent predictor of increased psychological difficulties among children. Experimental and field studies point to the detrimental role of parental conflict, particularly conflict that is extended, open, and angry, unresolved, and involves the child (Grych and Fincham, 1990).

The stress caused by exposure to anger is perhaps the most notable consequence of parental conflict on children. Children as young as 18 months old become emotionally upset when they witness angry exchanges between adults, and by the age of 5 or 6, children's distress is evident in their attempts to intervene in the conflict (Cummings, 1984).

High conflict between parents not only causes children immense suffering, it causes serious problems in their development. They soon have the sense that they cannot trust any adults “Perhaps the most serious effect of parents’ quarreling over children is that the kids learn that feelings are too painful; they teach themselves not to feel pleasure or pain. In the battle between you, they learn to be polished diplomats. They’ll tell each of you what you want most to hear not because they’re liars but because they want desperately to soothe each of you, to calm you down, to reduce their fears that you’ll become enraged. They’re afraid of your anger, they pity you, and they want you to feel better (Judith and Sandra, 2003). Children’s psychological adjustment is very directly affected by the amount and intensity of adult anger they experience. The more severe the conflict, the greater the effect (Carla ,Garrity and Mitchell, 1994).

According to the work of (Philip M., 2000), Conflicts between parents are likely to cause in children: Tension, anxiety, and regression, Feelings of confusion and embarrassment, Feelings of responsibility and self-blame, Withdrawal or clinging behavior at transitions, Long-term emotional and behavioral wounds, Feelings of disillusionment, fear, insecurity, or vulnerability, Temper tantrums, school problems, or self-destructive behaviors. Parents are better to realize how much children suffer when they are embroiled in parental battles and take steps to manage their anger responsibly, shield children from parental conflicts, and work cooperatively in each child’s best interest (Robert, 1994).

The previous literature studied the relationship between divorce and children’s educational success and psychosocial well-being. Yet, some gaps that can be explained in the following manner are seen in the previous studies. Firstly, these studies did not focus on the association of parental conflict and children’s psychosocial well being in its broad sense; rather they had been explaining it in terms of one or two components of psychological well-being such depression, anxiety, stress, self image, self esteem and educational failure etc. This cannot express the concept of psychosocial well being fully. In addition to this, there is no prior study conducted on the topic at the proposed area unlike the prevalence of the conflict as to the information gained from the concerned government bodies and this in return, adversely affect the children in one or the other way. On the other hand, most previous researches were conducted on children from divorced parent other than children with marital conflict. Only few of them were conducted on the sources of marital conflict and

children’s psychosocial well being. The same is true in our country where there are no considerable number of research conducted on the same topic.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study was to investigate the psychosocial wellbeing of children among families with parental conflict.

### **Specific objectives**

This study was undertaken with the following specific objectives:

- To identify common sources of parental conflict.
- To examine the status of psychosocial well being of children in parental conflict.
- To explore association between children’s psychosocial wellbeing among conflicting parents.
- To assess the local management techniques of parental conflict.

### **Significance of the Study**

The finding of this study will have importance for the following different bodies:

- The findings of this study enables children from marital conflict family to get good support that enhance their psychosocial wellbeing, by raising the understanding of parents as well as the overall community.
- Policy makers will also use the finding of this study as an input in the process of developing the policy that enhances the parents improve their relationship for the good future of their family specially their children.
- It will help individuals, institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations that are working on the issue of families to give due emphasis to the adverse effects of marital conflict on children in their service provision process and thereby enhance psychosocial well being of children.

### **Delimitation of the study**

The study was conducted in Jimma town, two selected kebeles to assess the sources, association between marital conflict and psychosocial well being of children. Participants of the study was parents and children who are between 10-17 years old, one child/subject was selected from each house hold, who are able to read and write and able to see, hear and speak. And other key informants were also included in the study as well.

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This chapter deals with the description of the research design, population and sample, instruments,

the procedure of data collection, and statistical analysis methods.

### **Design**

The study is descriptive designed to assess the factors causing marital conflicts and level of psychosocial wellbeing of children in conflicting parent. A descriptive approach in qualitative research gives the ability to collect accurate data on and provide a clear picture of the phenomenon under study.

### **Study area**

The study was conducted in two selected kebeles of Jimma town Oromia Regional State in southwestern Ethiopia. Jimma town is located at 350 Kms away from the capital city of the country, Addis Ababa.

The reason why the study area is selected was that informally the intensity of the problem seems high. The researcher knows the stud area well and respondents are more cooperative or willing to give information for data collectors who are part of the community. The researcher has the information that no research had been conducted in the area. That is why there was minimal reluctance of respondents and their answer was not influenced by the prior repeated researches.

### **Sample and sampling technique**

None Probability sampling technique, specifically, purposive sampling was used to select participants from the total population. Accordingly, 76 participants who are thought to be reach with important information, i.e. 22 mothers (14 from Ginjo Guduru kebele and 8 from Awetu Mendera kebele were participated) and 21 fathers were participated (15 from Awetu Mendera and 6 from Ginjo Guduru kebele of jimma town). When we come to children, 21 children categorized in to 3 groups participated in FGD. Among this, 14 were from Ginjo Guduru kebele and 7 from Awetu Mendera selected from the total population of the two selected kebele with the assistance of kebele leaders.

### **Inclusion criteria**

In order to be included in the study, participants should be living with both parents, between 10-17 years of age; and have the ability of hearing, speaking, reading and writing. The main reason why the researcher chose these age of children is for the purpose of minimizing respondents of mentally and socially not matured enough. Families who have been living together, local and religious leaders and kebele officials were also included in the study.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

Children from single parent, grandparent, sibling and the like, one or both parent missing household was not considered. In addition, sample with mental or other developmental disorder that can have a potential capacity to alter the respondents' cognition was not included.

### **Data collection Instruments**

Focused Group Discussions (FGD) guide was conducted with different social groups. At each of the selected kebele, different social groups composed of parents, children, elders, religious leaders, kebele officials especially women, children and youth sector officials was included in the discussions. FGD guide questions were prepared in collecting information from respondents. Moreover, unstructured interview check list was employed for key informant interview and also observation was used to collect relevant data.

Demographic information was gathered to reflect on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents including sex, age, and religion. The instruments used in the pilot study were corrected and accordingly used in the main study.

### **Interview**

Interviews were initially conducted with government sector officials and community leaders who have key responsibilities in the areas of family issues. Interviews took place with women, child and youth affairs sector officers at kebele and Jimma town level. These interviews yielded essential.

### **Focus group discussions**

Two focus groups, involving a total of 7 female and 7 male children and 7 female and 7 male parents was organized at two kebele of jimma town. The primary purpose of focus group discussion was to pretest difficulties in the wording and phrasing of the questions and to evaluate the time needed for completion of the discussion.

Generally this phase of the study can be stated successful and it gives opportunity to the researcher to readjust FGD guide and interview check list. Accordingly, five items from the instrument (2 guide from FGD in relation to parents, item 3 and 6, 2 FGD guide from items under children, 5 and 6 and 1 interview check list for elders, religious leaders and kebele officials) was found to be producing the same response with other items incorporated in the instrument and accordingly they are removed from the items.

### Data Collection Procedures

In the first place all data collection instruments were originally prepared in English language, which translated to mother tongue languages of respondents i.e. Amharic and Afan Oromo employing bilingual professionals so as to avoid language constraint. Kebele administrators informed the researcher detailed information of the dwellers in the kebele. Following this, respondents were informed about the confidentiality of all responses and about their right to participate or not. It was made clear for the participants that, even having signed the consent to participate in the study, yet, they were under no obligation to complete the study i.e. they are free to withdraw at any time without any precondition. Once the screening was accomplished and agreement reached to participate in the study, written informed consent was obtained. Data was collected using the tools.

### Ethical Considerations

Research designs should always reflect careful attention to the ethical issues embodied in research projects. At first place, approval letter of this study were obtained from Jimma University, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences research coordinating office and given to the respective kebele administration. The process of conducting research was begun after the permission obtained from the manager.

Participation of respondents was strictly on voluntary basis. Participants were fully informed as to the purpose of the study and consented. Measures were taken to ensure the respect, dignity and freedom of each individual participating and to assure confidentiality in the study. Participants were informed that the information they provide would be kept confidential and would not be disclosed to anyone else including anyone in the kebele. Respondents were informed of their right of withdrawal at anytime from participating in the study.

### Methods of Data Analysis

For this study, qualitative method of data analysis was employed. To analyze all data that were collected through, FGD, Key informant interview and observation narration was employed and also description of the finding was used.

### FINDINGS

Under this chapter the result of the study is presented in line with the research questions and presented in different parts. The first part focused on the background information of the respondents, the

second part presents the common sources of parental conflict, the third one is about the psychosocial well-being of children among parents with parental conflict the fourth part presents the association between parental conflict and psychosocial wellbeing of children and the fifth part presents about the local parental conflict management method.

### Background Information of Study participants

In this section, the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants were presented. The socio-demographic characteristics analyzed include sex, age and religion. In this study a total of 22 mothers (14 from Ginjo Guduru kebele and 8 from Awetu Mendera kebele were participated) and likewise 21 fathers were participated (15 from Awetu Mendera and 6 from Ginjo Guduru kebele of jimma town). When we come to children, 21 children categorized in to 3 groups participated in FGD among this 14 were from Ginjo Guduru kebele and 7 were from Awetu Mendera.

The other group of the research participant was from religious institutions. A total of 7 religious leaders composed of representatives (2 from Muslim, 2 from orthodox Tewahido 2 from Catholic and 1 from Yewuha misikiroch) were included in the study. 5 individuals from government offices and two community based selfhelp institutions were also involved into the study. From these representatives, 1 is from Ginjo Guduru kebele, 1 from Awetu Mendera Kebele and 1 from Jimma town Women, Children and youth affairs sector office and 1 individual is from Debre Mewi Medhanialem Idir and 1 from Birhan Idir.

### Common sources of marital conflict

The majority of the study participants commonly shared and pin out six areas to be major causes of conflict between parents. Accordingly, during the FGD sessions and interviews, respondents identified the following six cases as a determinant and major causes for parental conflict. All participants have got time to share their idea without any interruption.

### Money

Livelihood part of family is mostly dependent up on fathers in our context still in contemporary time even though it is impossible to deny the increasing share of mothers in this regard. The financial capacity of family is the important part of familial life to fulfill the biological and secondary needs of family members. Money starts to cause conflict between parents when:

- It is not sufficient to cover at least the basic needs of family members.
- Spent for personal items by one of the couple.
- Spent for drug use by either of the couple.

The most convincing idea is that it is inevitable that money will cause conflict when used unfairly and selfishly by either Parent. Therefore poor of the financial management has the potential to cause conflict between parents.

#### **Value conflict**

There is a value conflict where two people have different attitudes, beliefs and expectations. These differences may interfere in making decisions if they are inflexible and hold rigid, dogmatic beliefs about the "right way" to do things. Different values and beliefs predispose two people to choose different goals or different methods to achieve the same goals. And, since each goal requires an investment of time, effort and some sacrifice, they cannot pursue one goal without sacrificing the other to some extent.

#### **Unsolved past conflict**

According to the view point of the respondents when the amount of past unsettled conflicts increases among couples, the subsequent possibility of future tension among them is high. A lot of people withdrawn away from conflict management for the reason that, memories of past conflicts still hurt. conflict management almost unquestionably a large amount of long-lasting "scars" have been caused by conflicts with those who are closest to--family, close friends, trusted colleagues and in work groups.

#### **Power struggle between husband and Wife**

What made the situation more tense was the fact that nobody involved to scrutinize in this misunderstanding lack of effective communication. Parents would act out in negative ways and both or either parents would meet this behavior emotionally charged, with the intent of exercising their power over each. These escalated situations made it so that neither husband nor wife could trust and have respect for the other side.

#### **Drug use /Bad Habit**

All respondent children agreed that, the main reason for the happening of conflict especially between father and mother is unwanted habit. It is very well known that Jimma is known by the use of chat and drugs that may come after chat. Financial expenditure for the day to day consumption accompanied with other expenses that comes together with chat.

Traditionally, it is not forbidden to chew chat throughout Jimma zone, rather it is taken as a culture that is encouraged to use as part of motivation to execute some task and for refreshment. This tradition goes beyond the main purpose and currently it can be said that chat is normal for all without any cultural restriction and instead considered as normal part of daily life. This condition on the other side leads to shortage of time where parents lack appropriate interaction time with family members to provide care and support. Due to this fact, one of the parent complain one another stating that his/her counterpart didn't effectively discharge his/her responsibility and to the family. If not managed promptly it paves this way the quarrel that may last with serious parental conflict.

### **Announcement of laws permitting marital dissolution**

The issue of family is one of the hot issue and concern of Ethiopian government as it is the base for the overall stability and development of country. It is due to this fact that, government frequently revises the existing family code and made essential amendments when necessary. The dynamics of family life related with laws are becoming to be causes of parental conflict. Basically this is not to mean the laws are problematic by their nature, rather it is to mean that, the way people understand and interpret the law is negatively understood made the issue complicated. Issues related to equality of men and women is still not clear for the majority and become difficult for the existing community with the dominating cultural trends and traditional beliefs plus the introduction of laws allowing divorce. This law erodes the religious, cultural and traditional practices that strictly forbid marital dissolution any ways. The announcement of this law made the values and tolerance in marriage nominal and as a substitute encouraging partners to request for separation when conflict and disappointment arises as indicated by the elders and religious leaders. Most of the marital partners want to visit lawyers even for minor disagreement with their partner for consultation at extreme pole which has a devastating impact on the psychosocial wellbeing of their children.

### **Psychosocial wellbeing of children among families with marital conflict**

Under the second question of the research, respondents from religious institutions and community leaders boldly underlined that the psychosocial wellbeing of children among parents with extreme parental conflict is to be lower than those children with moderate parental conflict. Most of the time, as indicated by the respondents, they are observed to be reluctant to participate in social activities. They prefer to be alone while playing and schooling. Rather than enjoying with their age appropriate they get in to poor social relation and prefer to conceal themselves in to religious activities.

These children whose parents are in conflict disclosed the situation to the villagers and local elder's for intervention or other related assistance, the respondents indicated that this children feel inferior, lack self confidence, emotionally unstable and sometimes male children show aggressive behaviors. When conflict among parents gets critical some of these children prefer to relocate to their grandparents or other relatives.

Likewise, these children are also academically poor in their school achievements. The main reason for the achievement problem is difficulty having vision about future life and how to perform activities that needs socialization. Besides, they worry about the prospect of the family life that leads them, poor, uncertainty and stress which contribute for academic underachievement. The problem is sever to older children in the family for the fact that in Ethiopian culture the older ones are responsible and concerned to support those younger children besides the accountability of the parents.

Therefore, when one considers birth order the psychosocial problem is critical on older children than the younger. In another way, female children suffer a lot from psychosocial problems since in the culture of the community in the study area give great responsibility of the home to female children irrespective of their age order. Due to this fact female children have little access of sharing their emotion to relatives, close neighbor, intimate friends and religious leaders to have advice and guidance assistance. That is why most female children are forced to run out of home at early age either in search job somewhere else, get into unplanned marriage which still have a potential challenges to their future life. Hence female children are susceptible to psychosocial crisis than male in the family experiencing repeated conflict.

### **Local marital conflict management methods**

Conflict between parents is part of everyday life and how couples handle conflict in their relationship affects the strength and type of relationship couples may have. Conflict may have the power to destroy or to build a marriage. This makes it essential for married couples to know how to manage conflict effectively.

Some conflicts are inevitable in every marriage because no two persons have exactly the same personality, attitude, and values. A successful marriage is not necessarily one in which there are no conflicts, but rather is the one in which partners learn to handle their conflicts constructively, turning them into opportunities for improving communication and building a stronger marriage covenant.

Many couples do not have the ability to manage conflict in such a way that will strengthen their marriage. It is important to find ways to manage conflict to curb the effects of many escalated conflicts like fighting among couples, abuse of one

another, separation and divorce as a result of conflict, and murder which is the end result of escalated conflict.

From the focus group discussion and interview result done with the identified groups and individuals, it was understood that, the lion share of mediating parents when they are in conflict goes to the collective team of community elders and religious leaders and the process is known "Jaarsomma" and the team is "Jaarsota" in afan oromo. When the parents encounter problem and conflict arise, most commonly wives inform at least to 3 respected individuals to visit her house in team and hold discussion with their husbands on their issues around the table. This team is responsible to deliver advice and guidance to maintain peace and stability among the family in conflict also keep the issue confidentially.

#### **Association between parental conflict and psychosocial wellbeing of children**

One of the purposes of this study was to explore the association between parental conflict and psychosocial wellbeing of children. Accordingly, all the research participants agreed that parental conflict and psychosocial wellbeing of children is directly related in ways that it interferes with their day to day life. Children learn and practice gender role through play and forming friendship with others. In the same judgment, we have said that children within parental conflict had difficulty to engage in this type of relationship and therefore they have no opportunity to enhance their psychosocial wellbeing in one or the other way.

The degree of psychosocial wellbeing of children differs on the magnitude of the parental conflict. This is to mean that children with higher degree of conflict had serious psychosocial problems while those with moderate or low conflict had minimal level of psychosocial well-being problems. Those children from parents who are unable to resolve their conflict within short period and involve physical abuse frequently suffer a lot from multiple psychosocial crises than children from parents who manage their conflict in short time around the chair without engaging physical aggression.

#### **Discussion**

This section of the study aims at discussing the major findings of the current study in line with previous research findings reviewed in the literature. The

study has outlined the following research questions to be answered:

1. What are common sources of marital conflict in the area under the study?
2. What is the psychosocial wellbeing of children among martially conflicting family?
3. How parents and other important others manage the conflict?
4. What is the association between parental conflict and psychosocial wellbeing of children?

The results were discussed in the ways to answer the research question of the study. Therefore responses for research question, employed method of analysis and corresponding results were stated as follows.

The study respondents answered that there are a number of cases that are facilitating for parental conflict in their area ranging from minor to serious disagreements. They prioritized six major factors that intrigue for the parental conflict in the area. These are: money, value conflict, unsolved past conflict, power struggle between husband and wife, drug use /bad habit and announcement of laws permitting marital dissolution. These are identified as major responsible causes for inter-parental conflict which exposes children to multiple short-term or long-term developmental difficulties.

The result of present study shows that children with extreme parental conflict have low psychosocial well-being than children with moderate or low parental conflict. The findings of the present study are consistent with the findings of other studies conducted on the psychosocial well of children among parents with parental conflict. For example, Ellis M (2000), The longer chronic parental conflict continues and the greater the tension between the parents, the greater the likelihood that psychological difficulties will result for children such as emotional and behavior problems, anxiety, depression, sleep problems, low self-esteem, school problems and a number of other difficulties Children Feel Unsafe Chronic parental conflict that creates a climate of tension, chaos, disruption and unpredictability in the family environment that is meant to be safe and secure and comfortable to grow up in.

With regard to social life, conflict among parents negatively affects the development of children's social life skills which is consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Cummings, E.M. & Davies, P.T. (2002). Common outcome of destructive conflict between parents is the development of emotional or behavioral difficulties for children. Children's own social relationships can also be affected, with children prone to developing poor



interpersonal skills (Finger et al., 2010). As a result, children and young people in high conflict homes may have difficulties getting on with others, such as parents, siblings, teachers, peers and, in the longer term, romantic partners (Cui and Fincham, 2010). Difficulties can extend into school, with children less able to settle, more likely to have trouble getting on with peers, and less likely to achieve academically because of the impact of conflict between parents on children's cognitive abilities and attention (Harold et al., 2007).

A review of related literature shows that child in high-conflict families have levels of psychological and/or social wellbeing that are lower than those of children in harmonious intact families, and similar to if not lower than those of children whose parents have divorced. There is also evidence to suggest that a family environment marked by destructive conflict affects normal developmental processes, such as brain development, which in turn affect children's emotional, behavioral and social development. Marital conflict is associated with various child adjustment problems, including internalizing and externalizing problems and impairments in social and academic functioning. Marital conflict has deleterious effects on mental, physical, and family health, and three decades of research have yielded a detailed picture of the behaviours that differentiate distressed from non-distressed couples. Children living in high conflict two-parent families ~manifest more social, emotional, and behavioral problems than children living in single parent families with minimal conflict. Children's well being and development depend very much on the security of family relationships and a predictable environment Schepard A (2004).

On the other side, the community has traditional way of dealing/resolving parental Conflict when it happens. The study result indicated that, still parental conflict is something that will not be stopped at some point; rather it is part of family life and continues in the relationship. That is why the community is concerned with the issue as critical area of life. In the study area the very famous approach in managing parental conflict is through the mediating role of a team composed of elders, religious leaders and other respected individuals around the table. The mediating team plays the role of diplomacy between parents. They try to readjust misunderstanding and communication between parents. Likewise, Parental conflict management involves accepting or even encouraging such conflict as is necessary, but at the same time, doing everything possible to keep it to the minimum amount essential to change. This is done by

confining conflict to the least destructive forms and to resolve it as rapidly and constructively as possible. The study result indicated that most of the time parental conflict create more burden on first born children i.e. birth order place considerable effects on older children to suffer from psychosocial problems. A study conducted by Rands, M., Levinger, G. & Mellinger, G. (1981) also confirms that older children appear to be more vulnerable to the impact of conflict between parents than younger children. This may be explained, however, by a number of factors, including, a failure to fully capture the impact on younger children and the interplay of age and developmental stage and how that affects children's responses to conflict. It may also simply mean that older children have become more sensitive to conflict because they have been exposed to it for a longer period of time compared to younger children consequently; they get in to comparison with neighbors' life and community conditions where their home varies significantly in missing serenity and stability.

From the responses of the research participants, the degree of conflict by itself is a special area of attention as the level of conflict increases among conflicting parents the psychosocial problem of children raises together. The results of this particular study show that high levels of destructive marital conflict are associated with more psychosocial problems in children. Similarly, conduct problems can be understood as the inappropriate behavior of the child either at home or any other social setting. The child might throw tantrums, scream, fidget constantly, respond through fighting or violence, or they could express themselves through withdrawing and not responding at all. These results are consistent with, where children respond and adjust negatively to chronic marital conflict through behavioral means Mellinger, G. (1981).

## **Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

### **Summary**

The general objective of this study was to investigate the major sources of marital conflict, association between parental conflict and psychosocial well being of children in terms its management in some selected kebeles of Jimma town.

Qualitative methods were employed to answer the stated research questions. Focus group discussion and key informant interview was used to gather information. The focus group discussion was conducted in 6 groups with parents and 3 groups from children. Furthermore, interviews were held with the five representatives of Ginjo Guduru Kebele,

Awetu Mendera Kebele, Jimma Town Women, Children and Youth affairs office, Debremewi Medhanialem Idir and Birhan Idir based on an interview guide which aims at exploring the research questions. To analyze the data obtained (narration) a detailed description of the finding was used.

The following major findings were found from the analysis of the qualitative data:

The major causes of parental conflict in the study area were indentified to be six, i.e. Money, Value conflict, Unsolved past conflict, Power struggle between husband and wife, Drug use /Bad Habit and Announcement of laws permitting marital dissolution.

The study result showed that children with extreme parental conflict have low psychosocial well-being than children with moderate or low parental conflict. In the study area the very well known way of managing parental conflict is through the mediating role of a team composed of elders, religious leaders and other respected individuals around the table.

The results of this particular study show that high levels of destructive marital conflicts are associated with more Psychosocial problems in children.

### Conclusion

Based on the major findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

In the area under the study, six major causes are identified for parental conflict. i.e.(Money, Value conflict, Unsolved past conflict, Power struggle between husband and wife, Drug use /Bad Habit and Announcement of laws permitting marital dissolution).

The study participants boldly underlined that the psychosocial wellbeing of children among parents with extreme parental conflict is to be lower than those children with moderate parental conflict.

Parents seek intervention and support from the collective team of community elders and religious leaders when they face difficulties due to conflict caused by one or both parents. The mediators are expected to settle the problem together with both parents because they have good experiences and respected from multiple directions. Children with higher degree of conflict had higher psychosocial troubles while those with modest or low level conflict had minimal level of psychosocial wellbeing difficulty.

Therefore, from the finding of this study it is possible to say that children with parental conflict has

difficulty of psychosocial wellbeing and often deal with conflict through isolating themselves from social activities, externalizing their feelings through anger, aggression and hostility.

### Recommendations

Based on the major findings and conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were forwarded:

- The community elders, religious leaders and kebele level government structure are better to continue playing the arbitration role and provision of advice on marital issues.
- There is a need to teach couples principles and skills of marital conflict management that will help to build better marriages and better families' and a better society both from religious and modern perspectives by religious leaders, community leaders and government officials at kebele level.
- Marital counseling or advice program should cover factors that indicated under finding contributing to conflict in marriage.
- The married couples should be helped by religious leaders, community leaders and professionals at kebele level to develop and apply the following skills in their marriage: listening to each other, love, submission, forgiveness, dialogue and trust.

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