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**BRIDE PRICE PAYMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON GENDER EQUALITY
AMONG ME 'EN COMMUNITY: THE CASE OF ME'NIT SHASHA WOREDA
IN WEST OMO ZONE, SNNPS' REGION**

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Declaration

This thesis is my original research entitled; Bride Price Payment and Its Impact on Gender Equality Among the Me'en Community: The Case of Me'nit Shasha Woreda in the West Omo Zone, SNNP' Region, 2021 and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology. It complies with the regulations of Jimma University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality. All the sources or materials that I used in this research have been duly quoted and acknowledged.

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ACRONYMS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women
CSA:	Central Statistics Agency
FDRE:	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
IPV:	Intimate Partner Violence
MDGs	Millennium Development goals
NGOs:	Non-Governmental Organizations
SNNPRS:	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State.
UDHR:	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
WEF	World Economic Forum

GLOSSARY OF LOCAL TERMS

<i>Asha</i> :	Blood compensation payment when murder occurs
<i>Bee</i> :	Cattle
<i>Boru</i> :	porridge which is the well-known tradition meal of me'en
<i>Dama</i> :	Local elders of Me'en
<i>Dambu</i> :	Tobacco
<i>Donkur</i> :	A small grass hut which the young boys of Me'en built near by the main house of their parents to indicate their readiness for marriage
<i>Enkanogit</i> :	A group of bride's close relatives
<i>Gaha /tesikar</i> :	Preparing for overdrinking for Memorial of the dead person
<i>Gamen</i> :	Marriage in Me'en language
<i>Girl's Asha</i> :	Presenting girls as a means of blood compensation payment
<i>Joren</i> :	Forms of marriage based on the agreements of the two couples
<i>Kebele</i> :	The bottommost administrative in the federal structure of Ethiopia
<i>Kela/ Tilosh</i> :	Bride price
<i>Komoruts</i> :	Me'en's socio-political organization leaders or clan leaders (Literally balabbats, 'rain chief')
<i>Korisha /Birr</i> :	Ethiopian currency
<i>Losha</i> :	firearms
<i>Me'en</i> :	refers to "human beings" which denotes the general population in the Me'en language
<i>Me'nit</i> :	A single person who belongs to Me'en
<i>Qenesen</i> :	Widow Inheritance marriage
<i>Quren</i> :	Marriage by Abduction
<i>Shobi to 'Oka</i> :	Arranged marriage
<i>Sholu/ Borde</i> :	Local drink prepared from maize or sorghum among Me'en people
<i>Tuma</i> :	Sky-God (traditional religious beliefs of Me'en people)
<i>Woreda</i> :	The lowest administrative structural units below zone and above the kebele, in the federal structure of Ethiopia.
<i>Zuk – te</i> :	the clan groups and is the basic unit of Me'en socio-political organization

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Abstract

Introduction: Marriage in most indigenous societies, involves the transfer of resources between the couples' parent, and this transfer is culturally relative.

Objective: The main purpose of this study was to explore the practice of the bride price payment and perceptions among married women and men regarding its impacts on gender equality focusing on marital stability, violence and freedom; among the Me'en community in the West Omo Zone, SNNP Region.

Method: In order to address the objective of this study a qualitative research approach was employed. Two kebeles namely Jemu and Era-Me'nit were selected and the married women and men participants were selected by employing a purposive sampling technique. A total of 49 informants took part in this study. FGDs, In-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and case studies were used as methods of data collection.

Findings: Based on the finding of this study, the bride price is known as Kela among the Me'en people, and it is still widely practiced. The Me'en people have different forms of marriage, but bride price (kela) is found to be a key element and prerequisite of the marriage contract over all their marriage traditions. From the participants' point of view, the study revealed that although the bride price payment has its own advantages and disadvantages, the disadvantages are far greater on gender equality. Accordingly, married men participants were associated the practice with positive impacts while the married women were accompanying it with various drawbacks on their marital life. Due to bride price payment, women of Me'en face abundant violations of fundamental rights. The community see the girls as a source of income, women are subjected to threats, beatings or physical violence, and evictions from their homes, violation of full property right, denial of access to legal divorce, polygamous marriage, widow inheritance, and prohibitions of women's fertility rights are some of the problems or violations that women face as a result of bride price payment.

Recommendations: As the disadvantages of bride price payment are far greater, the study recommended that governmental organizations and other stakeholders that are working on women's issues should preserve the culture and work hard to reduce its drawbacks for women.

Key Words; Bride Price, Gender Equality, Marital Stability, Violence Against Women.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Marriage and the family are cultural universals, although they take on varied shapes depending on the culture and history of a given society. Marriage in most indigenous societies, involves the transfer of resources between the couples' parent, and this transfer is culturally relative. Due to cultural relativity, giving an all-inclusive definition of marriage is one of the areas of difficulty for social Science scholars. According to William (2012) marriage is the “...socially recognized, legitimized, and supported union of individuals of opposite sexes.”

Marriage is a universal institution (Stephen & Anthony, 2018). The process of marriage in most cultures entails transfers between the groom's and bride's families. These transfers are usually in the form of payments. For Unsar et al., (2016) it is considered one of the most important forms of social support for adults. Maria et al., (2011) also stated marriage is more than being together, rather a man and woman together as husband and wife to be father and mother to any children that their union produces. Similarly, to Zuzanna (2007), though the institutions of marriage and the family are cultural universals, they have different forms based on the societies' culture and history.

Although it is relative, the generally acceptable definition of marriage in Ethiopia is not only the union of the two couples to be married but also their families and kinship groups in blood. As Tsegaye (2015), stated marriage is a social union among the Arsi Oromo. It is not only a matter of the couples (the bride and the bridegroom). Marriage among Me'en people have its own marriage system hence, marriage among Me'en is highly valued, respected and practiced and it shown not only the union of the two couples to be married but also their families and kinship groups in blood as well their clans and involved transfer of wealth.

Marriage is one of the arenas to examine the situation of gender equality. As Evaluation Department of Norway (2015), defined the term gender equality is implying equal rights and opportunities regardless of gender. It involves changing how the both sexes relate to each other and bringing about a redistribution of power, resources and caregiver responsibilities between men and women. It means mutual respect, and freedom from gender-based violence and

harassment. Gender equality is depending on the realization of women's sexual and reproductive rights, including respect for women's freedom of choice and self-determination. It is based on respect for human rights and the inherent value of all individuals regardless of gender, social or ethnic background, including indigenous status, religion and belief, disability, age and sexual orientation (Evaluation Department of Norway, 2015).

Stephanie and Rita (2007) raised their question as follow, "though the efforts and changes are there in many countries but the questions behind is, do women still have a way to go to gaining full equality with men?" Women constitute a little over half of the world's population Elborgh - Woytek et al., (2013). Nonetheless, women are subjected to inequalities and discrimination, though the degree and extent varies from county to country and culture to culture in all societies and outside and inside spheres of activity.

Similarly in Ethiopia even though women constitute more than half portion of the population various studies indicated that they are facing social, economic and political marginalization throughout the years. The discriminatory political, economic and social rules and regulations prevailing in Ethiopia have barred women from enjoying the profits of their labor and economic development (Birhanu, 2006). Also, Mulatu (2016), stated that women account for half of the Ethiopian population and are more vulnerable than men due to many economic and social factors that work against them. In all societies and spheres of activity, women are subjected to inequalities and discrimination, though the degree and extent varies from country to country and culture to culture (Kalkidan, 2007). (Seema 2015 , Birhanu 2006, and Elshaday & Tsion 2015), were revealed that the socio-cultural situations of the county or the social arrangement particularly the patriarchal system through its various manifestations and the discriminatory political, economic, customary practices and social rules and regulations prevailing in Ethiopia have barred women from enjoying the profits of their labor and economic development.

Among the cultural practices that make women's marital life difficult, bride price takes precedence in many countries. Bride price is a practice mostly used to validate customary marriages and is very common in many African and Asian countries.

Bride price or bride fee is money, property, or other form of wealth paid by the bride groom or his family to the family of the woman he is about to marry or will soon marry (Okpe, 2005).

Bride price payment is one of the manifestations of patriarchy. According to Ottis Mubaiwa (2019), bride price intersects with religious beliefs on marriage which are in turn founded on patriarchal ideology that sees wives as the property of their husbands.

Bride fee practice is a significant cultural ritual in many African societies. As Ethiopia is part of sub-Saharan Africa, correspondingly different research has affirmed that this cultural practice of bride price is widespread among various communities, (Wossen, 2016, Adam, 2018, Asefach and Nigatu, 2008) etc., are some of the illustrations that partly identify the prevalence of bride price in Ethiopia in their conducted research. Bride price is a cultural phenomenon that is substantial and prevalent in the majority of indigenous countries. However, as long as any form of social practice comes with its own negative consequences, especially in the lives of women, it needs the interventions and continuous review of various bodies. The involvement may take several ways, starting from understanding the socio-cultural reasons why they are doing it, up to how the women and men, as well as the community at large, perceive the practice and the consequences of the practice. Therefore, this study was intended to explore the practice of bride price payment, the reasons behind the practice, and the perception of married men and women towards the influences of bride price payment on gender equality among the Me'en community.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

Researchers argued on two fronts about the positive and negative impacts of bride price payment. Half say it is socially and economically beneficial, while others conclude that it is harmful, especially to women. For instance, Sara and Nathan (2017) stated that bride fee practice is a common cultural practice in which the groom and/or groom's family pay the bride's family at the time of marriage and it is a significant cultural ritual in many African societies. Likewise, Lukabwe (2011) mentioned that many people use bride price as a token of saying "thank you!" for raising such a beautiful daughter and giving her to us (the bridegroom's family) and it was supposed to consist of gifts given to the parents of the bride in appreciation of their role in her nurturing.

Similarly, Samuel and Edwin (2018) stated that the practice of bride price is a distinctive and established feature of African customary law marriages, with the implication that it is an essential part of the establishment of "legality". According to the finding of these researchers, the requirement for bride price as a necessary component of the legal celebration of a customary

marriage is intensely deep-seated in many cultures throughout history. Additionally, Sara and Nathan (2017) found that there was no evidence that a larger bride price payment is associated with earlier marriage or with higher fertility. They stated that larger bride price payments are actually associated with better-quality marriages as measured by beliefs about the acceptability of domestic violence, the frequency of engaging in positive activities as a couple, and the self-reported happiness of the wife.

On the other extreme, besides its positive impact, various researches shown that bride price payment has appeared as a driving force behind gender disparity in some African countries. The practice of bride price payment is appearing as a gender issue that has effects on gender relations in various socio-cultural situations. It also has an adverse impact on gender equality, especially up on married women's life. To confirm the above argument, Kaye et al., (2005) indicate that the payment of the bride price is a gender issue that has implications for gender issues in various socio-cultural settings, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights are also negatively impacted.

Following the fact that the price of the bride is considered a matter of gender, in recent years, there have been widespread concerns that the practice of bride fee may have negative effects on girls and women. One concern is that because of the monetary payment received by the bride's family at marriage, it may incentivize early marriage, leading to higher fertility and so forth. It is also believed that it may promote the view that husbands have 'purchased' their wives, resulting in worse treatment of wives. In many locations, upon divorce the bride price must be paid back to the groom's family. This may cause an obstacle to divorce and result in women being trapped in unhappy marriages. Thus, Sara and Nathan (2017) indicated that in general, there has been widespread concern that the practice is detrimental to the wellbeing of women.

Also, Eryenyu (2014), stated that the objections stem from the view that the transactional nature of the practice of bride price results in the commodification of women and has adverse consequences. This researcher's findings demonstrated that, for example, husbands may believe they can mistreat their wives because they have paid for them, leaving women in marriages vulnerable to physical violence and conflict. In addition to this, the women's rights group Mifumi in Uganda reports cases where men say 'I am beating my cows' when they hit their wives, women are denied ownership of property, and women may be expected to be sexually

available to their husbands at any time and without protection. Not only that, but Henry (2013) too stated that while bride price has overwhelming support among members of the community, its motivations, processes, and outcomes are gendered and geared toward reinforcing masculinities and femininities that not only create, but also reinforce male dominance and female subordination, thus expanding gender inequality, reducing decision-making powers for women in households, and occasionally causing wife abuse in western Uganda. Likewise, Patience et al., (2020) revealed that paying *Lobola* (bride price) translated into buying a wife and as such, a wife became a husband's property. The study declared that the practice gives the man or husband power to treat his wife as he wishes, including subjecting her to sexual and other forms of abuse. The researcher expressed that this seems to take away a wife's right to make decisions on matters that affect their own lives, such as being restricted in her movements, choosing what to wear, and depriving her of a claim over her children, among others.

Isaac Dery (2015), correspondingly specified, although the bride price provides protection, respect, and acknowledgement of women within marriages, the researcher argued that the practice rather prescribes the role of women in marriages and further subordinates women to men. Tendai and Sambulo (2013) bride price disturbs the family concept whose basis it should be. The disturbance is mainly seen when bride price payment condemns women to a kind of marital enslavement. The enslavement denies women's right control over decision-making processes, family resources, their children and their own sexuality. In some cases, it takes away their economic freedom they might have acquired through education; especially in cases where the father demands compensation for educating the girl. He that argued, that bride price humiliates and dehumanizes women.

Another participatory action research entitled bride-price and its links to domestic violence and poverty in Uganda conducted by Hague, et.al (2011) found that bride-price was seen, overwhelmingly, to have mainly negative impacts on rural women and domestic violence was common. Bride-price introduces additional ways in which men can justify the abuse of women. The research clearly demonstrates that the commoditization of wives has led to deleterious social impacts, especially in terms of increased domestic violence and male power over women. Sambe et al., (2013) were too revealed that high bride price affects the stability of marriages through precipitation of domestic violence, poverty especially among young couples, caused

dehumanization of the women and increased propensity for divorce. The study concludes that high bride price has negative effect on marital stability. Lucia and Alessandra (2016) also explored the income shocks increased the probability of child marriages and the probability of early fertility among women in rural Tanzania.

Unfortunately, only few researchers have made efforts to understand the situation in various areas of Ethiopia. Therefore, insignificant attempts have been made to address a few sorts of issues through current studies in relation to bride price payment and its influence on gender equality in our country. For example, in the case of the Bench Maji zone, an exploratory study was conducted to determine whether the bride price has an effect on the marital rights of women in the Bench community by (Adam, 2018). According to Adam (2018), Bench women's marital rights are violated by the customary practice of bride price. The study revealed that, the bride price payment was the cause for polygamous marriage, widow inheritance, and women's labor exploitation. It is also shown that women's right to education, property, legal divorce, and the decision-making role within the household. The former research was conducted to focus on the payment of bride price and its implications for the marital rights of women, since the research was conducted from the perspective of human rights in the school of law at AAU, in the case of the Bench community at the Bench Maji Zone. This current study, however, was conducted in terms of spatial differences at Me'nit Shasha woreda among Me'en people from gender and family perspectives in order to fill the geographical gap. Another research conducted by Wossen (2016) at Gambella region shown that early marriage is driven by bride price practice payment, and cause for girls' school dropout. However, the researcher of the study was mentioned bride price payment practice as one factor for girls' school dropout. The study didn't address the implications of bride price payment on women's marital life from the community viewpoint. To do so, this current study was focused on giving more attempts to bride price and gender equality in the Me'en community, particularly focused on the influence of bride price payment on women's marital life from the participants' point of view.

All the mentioned studies relied only on one extreme, either positive or negative impacts of the practice, and were less concerned with understanding the implications of bride price payment from the view of women and men regarding its impacts on gender equality specifically. Also, these studies, however, do not include the roles and views of women and men equally. To fill

this gap, this study incorporated the roles of women on the application of bride price payment and views of married women and men about the influences of the practice on women's marital life in the Me'en community. Though much has been studied to explore the practice of bride price payment and its relationship with gender equality in many African countries such as Kenya and Uganda, little or no such research has been conducted in Ethiopia, especially in the Me'en community. This negligence may create a gap in the academic literature. Therefore, this research was directed at searching for a description of the practice of bride price and perceptions among women and men regarding its influence on gender equality focused on marital stability, violence, and freedom among Me'en communities, particularly in the case of Me' nit Shasha Woreda.

1.3 General Objective

The general objective of the study was to explore the practice of the bride price payment and perceptions among women and men regarding its impact on gender equality among the Me'en community at Me' nit Shasha Woreda, in the West Omo Zone, SNNP Region.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

In line with the above general objective of the study, the specific objectives of the study were;

- To describe the practice of bride price payment in the study area.
- To explore the socio-cultural reasons underpinning bride price payment in Me'en community.
- To ascertain the perception of women about the influence of bride price payment on their marital life.
- To explore the views of men about the influence of bride price payment on women's marital life.
- To describe the impacts of the bride price payment practice on the ability of women to claim their rights.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Women are half of the world's population and without their full participation in the development process, it is impossible to bring change. Women's development attempts have been proven to be useless around the world due to their exclusion from development. If a country can reduce or eliminate the gender gap, it will have a better chance of developing and reducing poverty.

Likewise, in our country as Mulatu (2016) stated that women account for half of the Ethiopian population and are more vulnerable than men due to many economic and social factors that work against them. Therefore, it requires transformation of the structures, systems and practices which lie at the root of women's subordination and gender inequality. In this regard, identifying the influences of bride price practices on women's status is regarded as critical in order to challenge existing practices and bring about social transformation in which women can participate in all aspects of the development process in the study area as well as the country on an equal footing with men. Following that, conducting this study will have multiple implications for various target groups, especially given its practical and academic significance.

First and foremost, it will assist the researcher in obtaining an MA degree. Also, the study may be used as a reference for students and other actors those who have an interest to conduct research on the same issue. Mainly it will to give an insight about the influences of bride price payment towards the women's marital life mainly concerning with marital stability, violence and freedom among Me'en community at the study area. It will possibly provide data for interested parties in the promotion Me'en communities and their cultural practice of bride price payment and it's on impacts on efforts to ensure gender equality; among Me'en community, West Omo Zone, SNNP' Region. It will also have a contribution to the study of sociology of family and gender. Therefore, government and non-governmental organization will be benefited from the research out comes.

1.5. Scope of the Study

This study was delimited to describe the influence of bride price payments on gender equality in the Me'en community. The study has methodological, geographical and thematic scopes. Thus, methodologically the study employed a qualitative research approach while geographically it was delimited to the Me'nit Shasha Woreda mainly on the Me'en communities' bride price cultural practice at the two selected kebeles (Jemu and Era-me' nit), and thematically, it was delimited to describes bride price payment practice and gender equality among the Me'en community, explore the perceptions of married women and men towards the influences of bride price practices on women's marital life through making marital stability, violence, and freedom the scope. The research basically focused on the nature and rationale of the practice depending on the participants' view, the multifaceted challenges that women face within marriage as a

result of that practice with special emphasis on bride price and gender equality. Also, the whole determinants of socio-cultural practices that affect women's status, as well as the entire community of Me'en people, and women and men who have never married were not covered in this study. Also the study has temporal scope. Accordingly the study was conducted from September 2020 up to November 2021.

1.6. Limitations of the study

Despite extensive efforts to fill every gap, the study has various limitations due to a variety of constraints that the researcher faced. In this study, the researcher encountered many problems. For instance, participants' unwillingness to respond to certain issues, failure to attend appointments, lack of previous research on the subject of the study in the area, and lack of sufficient data on the subject as required by the woreda, and so on. The other problem is that since the zone was newly established, it was a little difficult to get enough information, such as reports, photos, and recorded documents, in this regard. Following the establishment of the zone, the Woreda structures had to be cluttered in terms of space and data management. As a result, the work of the study, in particular the process of data collection was difficult.

CHAPTER TWO

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES

This chapter presents review of related literatures in relation to bride price, socio-cultural practices of bride price and its influence on women's ability to claim their right. In social research, the ability to locate relevant prior work is crucial. The vast increase in the dimensions and type of information, as well as the growing complexity of interrelated disciplines of knowledge, has emphasized the necessity for systematic searching, critical assessment, and synthesizing descriptions of earlier research. The issue of identifying relevant, related literature is addressed in this entry. As a result, an effort was made in this section of the paper to review the existing literature and previous studies related to the subject under inquiry. The researcher has analyzed and developed his thoughts on existing concepts, theories, and empirical literature relevant to the area under study as a result of this.

2.1 Conceptualization

2.1.1 Definitions of Concepts

Bride price: It is the customary practice of which involves the transfer of goods or cash from the groom or groom's family to the bride's family at the time of marriage (Okpe, 2005). Also, in Me'en traditions it is a cultural practice used to validate customary marriage and it consists of a contract where material items (often cattle, firearms and money) are paid by the groom or his family to the bride's family during marriage contract.

Dowry: Transfer of a substantial amount of property from the bride's relatives to the bride, the groom, or the kinsmen of the latter (Adam, 2018).

Bride service: A substantive material consideration in which the principal element consists of labor or other services rendered by the groom to the bride's kinsmen (Adam, 2018)

Marriage: is socially recognized, legitimized, and supported union of individuals of opposite sexes. Similarly, in our context it is the recognized union of the two couples to be married, their families and kinship groups.

Marital stability: Marital stability can be defined as remaining legally married without divorce, physical separation, or legal separation (William,2012). It is all about Marriage harmony.

Violence against Women (VAW): is defined as a social subject that consists in any act of violence based on gender, which may result or actually results in physical, sexual or psychological harm, including threats, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, in either private or public life.

Gender: is socially constructed and gender refers to the personal sexual identity of an individual, regardless of the person's biological and outward sex

Gender equality: is implying equal rights and opportunities regardless of gender. When people of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities (Evaluation Department of Norway, 2015).

Gender Inequality: Gender inequalities are unequal disparities caused by multiple factors. These unfair inequities are deeply ingrained in social institutions, which perpetuate their presence and make their eradication difficult. Gender disparities in resource access and control are frequently cited as a source of inequality.

2.2 Review of Related Literatures on Bride price Payment

Many researchers have extensively studied the bride price paid during marriage in various ways. The most widely accepted definition; however, is that a bride price is a type of payment made by the groom or groom's family to the bride's family during the marriage in the form of money, cattle, or other valuable properties. A bride price payment is a cash or in-kind transfer made by or on behalf of the groom/groom's family to the bride's family upon the couple's marriage. According to Lucia and Alessandra (2016), it is money, property, or other form of wealth paid by a groom or his family to the family of the woman he is about to marry or has recently married.

The practice also has a long history, dating at least as far back as 3000 BCE, having been practiced by the Ancient Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Hebrews, Aztecs, and the Incas (Anderson, 2007). Marriage is a worldwide cultural concept. The process of marriage in most cultures involves exchanges between the groom's and bride's families. The majority of these transfers are in the form of payments. In general, such bridal payments are divided into two categories: dowry and bride price (Anderson, 2007). The custom of dowry, mainly practiced in South Asia, involves payments made by the bride to the groom or his family (Callaway, 2017.; Mangena & Ndlovu, 2013). Conversely, bride price refers to the payments that a prospective groom and his

family make to a prospective bride and her family (Adjei, 2016; Anderson, 2007). Payment of bride price remains a common and valued cultural practice in most African countries.

Rees et al., (2017) also demonstrated that although the custom of bride price varies in its detail and implementation across diverse cultures, the core universal element involves the transfer of offerings, goods or funds principally from the groom and his family, to the bride's family. The payment of a bride price at the time of marriage is a custom that is widespread throughout sub-Saharan Africa and many parts of Asia today Nava et al, (2016). In recent years, this practice has come under criticism, particularly in Africa. A number of objections have been raised in both the media and in political discourse. Recent examples of articles from African newspapers criticizing the practice include Kelly (2006), IRIN News (2006), and Eryenyu (2014). The objections stem from the view that the transactional nature of the practice results in the commodification of women and has adverse consequences. For example, Eryenyu (2014) stated that husbands may feel they can mistreat their wives because they have paid for them, leaving women in marriages prone to physical violence and conflict.

2.3 Bride Price Payment and Patriarchy

The concept of patriarchy is defined differently by different scholars and researchers. The term patriarchy refers to male dominance in both the public and private spheres. It is now used more broadly "to refer to male dominance, power relationships in which men dominate women, and to characterize a system in which women are kept subordinate in a variety of ways" Bride price payment is one of the manifestation of patriarchy (Bhasin , 2006). Also, Abeda (2010) contended that patriarchy is the prime obstacle to women's advancement and development. Patriarchy is a broad network or system of hierarchical organization that cuts across political, economic, social, religion, cultural, industrial and financial spheres, under which the overwhelming number of upper positions in society are either occupied or controlled and dominated by men (Okpe, 2005). This patriarchal system has significant institutional and cultural manifestations and bride price is the one. To understand how the bride price is a byproduct of the patriarchal system it better to see what is revealed by According to Ottis Mubaiwa (2019), bride price intersects with religious beliefs on marriage which are in turn founded on patriarchal ideology that sees wives as the property of their husbands. And the researcher argued that practices such as bride price are harmful and represent barriers to the empowerment of women. Bride price or bride fee is money,

property, or other form of wealth paid by the bride groom or his family to the family of the woman he is about to marry or will soon marry. Though, Marriage is an institution that exists in all human societies, as most researches indicated that for most African cultures, it involves the bride price payment by the bridegroom or his family to the bride's family.

Various researches indicated that bride price is remarkably practiced in several regions of the world, including in our continent. The practice of paying bride price is also enormously common in East Africa. To confirm this, Ashraf et al. (2020) revealed that the payment of bride price at the time of marriage is a custom that has deep historical roots and is widespread throughout sub-Saharan Africa and many parts of Asia today. The practice of this bride price has traditionally been significant, and it continues to be so today.

For instance, Mbaye and Wagner (2017) also stated that contrary to a dowry payment, where the bride and her family give the marriage payment to the groom and his family, in many sub-Saharan African countries, particularly in Senegal, the bride's price payment is a key element of the marriage contract. Similarly, Sara and Nathan (2017) expressed bride fee practice is a common cultural practice in which the groom and/or groom's family pay the bride's family at the time of marriage. It is a significant cultural ritual in many African societies. Isaac Dery (2015), Stephen and Anthony (2018), in Ghana, , Nava Ashraf et al. (2018), Patience et al. (2020) and so forth were those who conducted research and wrote about the existence of bride price payment and its impact in Africa.

2.4 Bride price payment and Marital Stability

Marital stability is strictly defined as remaining legally married in a shared household over time (Mitchell, 1977)¹. Various researches have stated that bride-price has both positive and negative effects on marital stability. Half studies suggest that bride-price has a positive effect on a stable family or marriage, while others link it to many sexual assaults. For instance Obotu (2012) associated the bride's price payment with a better quality of marital life. He revealed that the bride price payment can positively impacted to marital stability. A larger bride price payment is

¹ The researcher used (Mitchell, 1977) because there was no updated source on the issue until the study was conducted.

associated with earlier marriage or with higher fertility. Sara and Nathan (2017) also found that larger bride price payments are associated with better-quality marriages as measured by beliefs about the acceptability of domestic violence, the frequency of engaging in positive activities as a couple, and the self-reported happiness of the wife.

Wegh (2003) also noted that bride-price helps in stabilizing of family alliance. The idea here seems to be that in the fear paying back bride price after dissolution of a marriage may lead the family of the woman to do its part in ensuring that marriage is successful.

Adjei and Anthony (2018) expressed that higher bride price payments reduce the fertility pressure for women with results being robust to confounding socio-economic and contextual factors. The fertility-reducing impact is greater for women who are economically dependent on their husbands. In polygamous households and for arranged marriages, a lower bride price increases fertility pressure while in monogamous households and for non-arranged marriages, the bride price does not affect fertility.

On the other hand, Sambe et al., (2013) revealed that bride-price has detrimental effect on marital stability due to the fact that it increases the possibility of domestic violence as men consider women as their property bought at high prices, as a result leads to ill treatment which could affect marital relationships. Furthermore, high bride-price has the tendency to subject couples' poverty especially newly marries ones as huge resources are been expended by the groom or his family leaving him stretched economically. Too, Bloch and Rao (2002) found that high bride prices can affect marriage stability in rural India. They presented a concept in which the husband impedes his wife's health in order to extract money from his in-laws for an overpriced bride. Bloch and Rao rely on a signaling mechanism, in which the abandonment threat is made credible by resort to violence. The bride's family gives in to violent behavior because it can only be committed by husbands willing to abandon their wife if their request is not satisfied. Thus, bride price was found precipitate violence which has high tendency to affect stability of marriages.

study conducted by Platteau and Gaspart, (2005) in Senegal indicated that high bride-prices contribute to alienation of women and transform them into commodities or into their husband's slaves. They associate bride price with expression that shows a deep-seated frustrations and intense suffering. In Uganda, Hague and Thiara (2009) also wrote on the effect of high bride

price on men which has serious implications on marital instability. Those researchers identified the effects of high bride price on marital instability included poverty which the couples are forced enter into by way of incurring severe debt. They maintained that high bride price heaps huge pressure on young inexperienced men when they have no resources; and young people starting marriage and adult life in financial trouble as poverty has serious implications on stability of marriages. Many studies have been conducted on the effect of bride price payment on the stability of marriages in many African countries. But not much has been done in our country.

2.5 Bride price payment and Gender equality

Bride price payment beside its positive impact, different studies stated strongly associated the practice with various disadvantages on women's agency. Recently, the custom has come under attack, receiving condemnation as a repugnant and harmful practice, and leading to calls for its abolishment (Wendo, 2004; Mujuzi, 2010). Although the benefits of bride-price in the past have been widely acknowledged, there has been growing concern in recent years about the detrimental effects of bride-price, particularly on women, children, family life, and community development. Bride-price has been connected to concerns of poverty (Tamale 1993 and 2004) and, in particular, domestic violence and violations of women's human rights, and requests for its reform have been made (Matembe, 2004; MIFUMI 2001 and 2004; Oumo, 2004; Osuna 2003; Sekagya, 2004).

According to Hague and RaviK (2009) bride-price was considered by the vast majority of informants to cement gender inequality, giving women little power, and possibly turning them into 'commodities' to be passed from family to family, leading to entrenched inequality between husbands and wives. Bride-price can lead to the 'selling' of human beings because the family needs wealth. The researchers revealed that young girls can be deprived of education as parents need the bride-price, and so early or forced marriage can occur.

As Gill Hague and Ravi stated bride-price was now considered by the majority of informants to cement gender inequality, giving women little power and possibly turning them into commodities to be passed from family to family. Thus, bride-price can be seen both as a symptom of male dominance and power in families and also as a cause. Consequently, the subservient position of the wife is made worse and greater inequality is frequently caused by the payment of bride-price.

Bride price at the time of marriage was identified as a major impediment to women's ability to assert their right to the marriage institution. It is associated with the commodification of women, violence, male domination over all the family aspects or power imbalance in marriage (Eryenyu, 2014). Alupo (2004) have cited instances where bride price is a major factor contributing to domestic violence in the relationships thereby threatening the stability of marriage in Uganda. He stated a lot of women in Uganda have suffered and had their rights violated because of bride price payment bride price and it is a commercial transaction with the marriage being valid only when bride -price has been paid but it has sometimes been seen as the basis for the claim that women are exchanged for goods as if they were commodities, normally there is bargaining between the parties concerned.

2.6 Bride price and Gender inequality

Bride price payment is one of the most highly cherished practices, highly rated not only in Uganda but also in many other African countries (Henry, 2013). The function is performed to formalize and solemnize the marriage before the partners can be recognized as husband and wife. According to (Hague 2011) bride price is widely practiced and used as basis to validate customary marriages in African countries. It involves exchange of material gifts like livestock, cash, goats, sheep depending on the particular society, but of recent, due to the influence of modernization and westernization, other new and 'modern' gifts like land titles, electronics, furniture, home theatre systems, cars and other items have been introduced into the process to go hand in hand with the so called 'traditional' items. According to (Henry 2013) there are increasing concerns about the negative effects of bride price on women in Uganda as it is argued that it turns them into purchasable commodities. This brings negative effects on women, children, family life and general community development. Women activists and scholars have accused it of having a high correlation with domestic violence, degradation of women dignity and violation of human rights. They thus call for its reform (Matembe, 2002, Thiara and Hague, 2011).

Different researchers revealed that the practice of bride price payment is related to gender disparity directly and indirectly. Bride price payment has implications on gender relations, values, expectations and role (Dan et al., 2005). She found that men seemed to have lost identity and their position was weakened by altered gender relations following modernization, resulting

into gender antagonism regarding perceived roles. In a qualitative study carried out by us on perceptions and experiences of domestic violence in Wakiso district, payment of bride price emerged as one of the factors associated with domestic violence. Bride price payment has implications on gender relations in different socio-cultural contexts and impacts Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. According to (Dan et al 2005) the Participants perceived bride price as indicating that a woman was ‘bought’ into the man’s household, which reduced her household decision-making roles. It limited women’s independence and perpetuated unequal gender power relations, especially regarding health-seeking behavior.

Bride price payment and some of the procedures and experiences involved are heavily influenced by the notion of masculinity, femininity and highly gendered in nature (Henry 2013). Lorber looks at gender as constituting “an institution that establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the social processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organization of society, such as the economy, ideology, family and politics and is also an entity in and of itself” (Lorber 1995:1) Bride price constitutes situations where men are trying to assert their influence and power over women in order to reinforce their feelings of “total manhood”. It also reveals a process where most of the women are trying to fulfill the gendered roles and expectations as have been socialized by society over time.

Subordination means, “Something else is less important than the other thing” (Cobuild 2010:1559). According to Advanced Learners Dictionary, “subordination means having less power or authority than somebody else in a group or an organization” (Hornby 2003:1296).

In Ethiopia, women and girls are found to be in a strong disadvantage position in their livelihoods and respect of their human rights accompanied by lower In Ethiopia, traditional values, cultures, norms and beliefs played a significant role for the continual existence of gender-based stereotypes which in a way drags the social, economic, political and cultural participation and contribution of women within the country. The status of women in every aspect of life is critically low. This is manifested by the lower economic status of women mainly because they earn less, have acquired lesser educational status, deprivation of recognition for their contribution in the labor economy such as in agricultural field and little or no participation in the decision-making process even on matters that can directly affect them status and lack of support within the society.

Harmful traditional practices particularly violence against women such as intimate partner violence against women, sexual violence, marriage by abduction and rape as well as early marriages is widely accepted norms within the different parts of the country. Such traditional practices ensure the continual existence of the lower status of women within the society. The Constitution of Ethiopia under article 35(1) ensures gender equality in every aspect of life and in order to compensate the historical legacy of gender inequality within the country, it entitled women to benefit from affirmative action. Ethiopian society is a patriarchal one where women living both in rural and urban areas are subjected to various forms of violence. A number of complex social, cultural and independent factors have contributed for its prevalence. The causes are usually related to addictive behavior to alcohols and drugs, family history of violence, the level of education and decision-making power of the partner. Most factors indicated gender inequality in terms of power that promotes superiority of men. The constitution of Ethiopia put obligation on the state to eliminate harmful traditional practices that oppress or cause bodily harm to women. Article 564 in conjunction with article 553(1) of the 2004 revised penal code criminalized violence against women committed with in marriage or irregular union (Etsegenet, 2016).

Similarly, due to different reasons in Me'nit Shasha Woredas of West Omo Zone in SNNPR region the statuses women are law in every aspect. Taking related works into consideration, this study was focused on the impacts of bride price culture on women's marital life including women's participation and access to education and status in Me'nit Shaha woreda among the Me'nit ethnic community.

2.7 Sociological theories that explain gender equality

To guide this conducted research, the researcher has been selected structural oppression theories. Structural oppression theories argued that some groups of people deliberately oppress and exploit other segments of the society to maximize their benefits at the expense of the victims. Structural theories further support their position by asserting that social structures are used to facilitate the domination of men over women.

Social structures such as patriarchy, racism, capitalism and heterosexualism are intricately linked and mutually reinforcing that shape the intensity of gender inequality and experience of women oppression. From structural oppression theories, socialist feminism and intersectionality theories

will be used to advance our understandings of the influence of bride price payment in exacerbating gender inequality.

2.7.1 Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminists explain gender inequality as the inevitable consequence of capitalist economic system serve as the foundation of patriarchal system. In capitalist system, gender-based division of labor is deliberately established to benefit men and disadvantage women. Men own means of production and their works have monetary value. In contrast, women are restricted to domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, child caring and so on that do not usually have direct monetary returns. These gave men an advantage of making decision on family affairs as they are regarded as bread winners. Socialist feminism was very important to conduct this research because it gave an insight to explore the socio-cultural factors that serve as the foundations of bride price payment. Specifically speaking, this theory was advanced our understandings of the rational why do men pay bride price to marry women? It was also enabled the researcher to explore the contribution of women in economic aspects and their power to command it.

2.7.2 Intersectionality Theory

The concept of intersectionality has gained popularity especially in feminist scholarship as having potential to analyze peoples' problems and, experiences from a multidimensional point of view which guards against the danger of being monolithic and shallow in inquiry. It looks at the interaction of multiple and intertwined identities, experience, exclusion, subordination or oppression. Other than focusing on gender as a singular entity, it goes further to focus on issues of difference, diversity among women and also men. While giving clear attention to issues of race, class, power, sexuality, status, financial status, disability, heteronormativity along with gender, depending on the prevailing characteristics people under study (Davis, 2008).

(Brah and Phoenix, 2004) while emphasizing the need for an intersectional approach argue that studies need to analyze how social class and intersections with gender and race or sexuality operate simultaneously to affect one's social positioning and daily experiences, and how analyzing their intersections leads to a more complex understanding of reality than focusing on single characteristic. They emphasize the issue of multiple, intersecting and relational nature of realities and subordinations (Brah and phoenix, 2004)

In sum, Intersectionality theory asserted that the intensity of gender inequality and experience of women's oppression varies from women to women depending on women's relative position in social structures taking into consideration other arrangements of social inequality such as class, race, global location, sexual preference and age. They do not however deny the universality of gender inequality, meaning women across the world face some form of gender inequality for the mere reason that they are women.

Intersectionality theory was found highly relevant in guiding this conducted research because though patriarchy is a universal system of oppression, its manifestations are varied. Bride price payment, as one of the manifestations of patriarchal system and its influence on exacerbating gender inequality should be researched and recognized. The practice of bride price varies from social context to context and therefore assessing the way how it intersects with other arrangements of social inequality to sustain gender inequality was the interest of the researcher.

Therefore, issues like the practices of bride price payment, socio-cultural factors that underpin the practice bride price payment and the perceptions of women towards the practice were understood by using intersectionality theory.

CHAPTER THREE

3. RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

This section presented the method used to conduct the study. It started with a description of the study area and was followed by a discussion of the methodological approach of the study, including sources of data, sampling techniques and procedures, study design, details of the data collection methods and tools, sampling procedures and study site selection, methods of data analysis, and ethical considerations. Further, it gives a description of how the informants of the proposed study were selected, what different instruments were prepared, how the data was collected, and the methods by which the collected data was analyzed.

3.1 Description of Study Area

3.1.1 Background of Me 'nit shasha woreda

The study was conducted in the West Omo zone, particularly at Me'nit Shasha Woreda. Me'nit shasha woreda is one of the seven woredas in the West Omo Zone. The Me'nit Shasha woreda's administrative center, Jemu City, is located 684 km southwest of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, and 954 km southwest of Hawassa, the capital of the SNNPR (*Source; Me'nit Shasha Woreda's Road and Transport Office*). Me'nit Shasha woreda is divided administratively into sixteen (16) kebeles and one town administration, which is Jemu. Jemu is located far away, 124 km from Mizan town, and the second kebele, Era-Menit, is also far away, about 17km from Jemu. As the Central Statistics Agency (CSA) of 2007 stated, the total population of Me'en people puts them in the fourth largest ethnic group next to Kafa, Sheka, and Bench in the southwestern part of Ethiopia. The total population of Me'nit Shasha woreda is about 43,305 out of the total population of Me'en people, as cited by (Nigus and Hailu, 2020).

MAP OF ME'NIT SHASHA WOREDA

FIG .1 MAP OF THE STUDY AREA

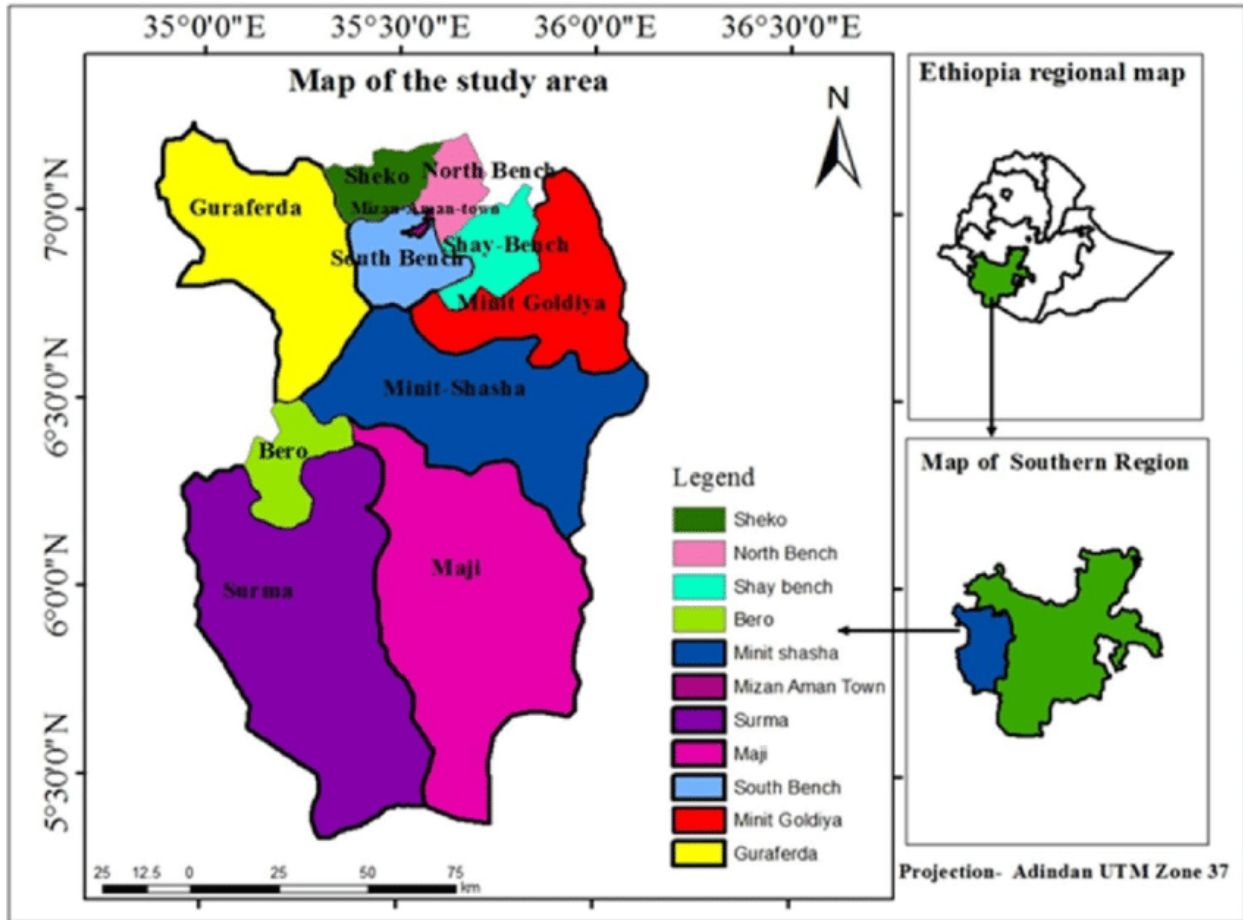


Figure 1 Source; Uploaded by (Alemayehu et al., 2020).

3.1.2 Early History and Origins of Me'en people

The historical foundation of the origin of the term Me'en, predominantly as to when and by whom the term was pioneered, is unclear (Nigus & Hailu, 2021). Nevertheless, the Me'ent community call themselves as Me'en. As the local elderly people and dwellers said, the meaning of the word *Me'en* refers to "human beings" in the Me'en language, which denotes the general population who reside along the Omo and the Shorum River valleys in the Me'en language. Whereas the term *Me'nit* refers to an individual who belongs to Me'en (a single person). As stated by (Megersa, 2012), the Me'en people are lived in the south-western part of Ethiopia, close to the borders with Sudan and Kenya. They are linguistically categorized under the Nilo-Saharan

Previously, it was stated that the Me'en are one of the Nilo Saharan language-speaking groups who predominantly live in the Me'enit Goldiya and Me'enit Shasha areas of the Bench Maji zone in the south-western part of Ethiopia by (Megersa, 2012). However due to the political transition in 2019, the former Bench Maji zone was split into two zones: namely Bench Sheko Zone and West Omo Zone. And following this, the administrative structure of Me'en was divided into Me'enit Goldiya, Me'enit Shasha, Gachit and Gorigesha weredas under the governorship of West Omo zone by making its administration centre Jemu town. Furthermore, the study area (Me' nit Shasha) is now part of the newly formulated zone which is the West Omo zone and it is also one of the seventh woreda in the zonal structure.

In sum, the Me'en community is currently settled in the south-western parts of Ethiopia; it is a nation living in the newly formed West Omo Zone. In terms of lifestyle, they are also a semi-pastoralist society, which means they partly farm and partly raise cattle. Similarly, Me'enit societies, according to Awoke (2007), are agro-pastoralists. They differ from other pastoralist communities in that they do not move from one location to another; they are a stable community with organized governmental structures.

The Me'en people are distinct peoples who have common ancestry, common language, traditional believes and territory. They all claim worri as their common father and their socio-political administrative system based on clan entitled (zuk-te), and its leader was known as *komorut*. The people call themselves as Me'en and language Me'enit (Me'en). The Me'en trace their origins to the South Omo based on data gathered from informants of various community elders. The informants have two perspectives on the factors that prompted the Me'en people to migrate from the south Omo River to their current highland settlement. According to some informants, the Me'en people came to their current land due to drought in search of pasture land and water for their livestock. Other informants suggested that the reasons for migration were due to the loss of livestock due to the cattle epidemic disease known as yambarit (tsetse fly) (Megersa, 2012).

As the previous data in this regard ascertained, the Me'en people lacked a hierarchical socio-political administrative structure. They lived in an egalitarian society with no visible differences in wealth or social hierarchies among lineage groups. According to Zerihun (2009) the Me'en were a loosely organized political and social group. In other words, their socio-political structure

did not reach maturity into organized chiefdoms and a structured administrative hierarchy. Also, Zerihun further said that; the basic unit in Me'en socio-political organization was the clan (*zuket*), and its leader was known as *komorut*. Based on this author's explanation, the Me'en's socio-political administrative system was komorutship (*komoraset*), of which the male group was elected through a system of family-based ritual power inheritance.

As regards the original home of the Me'en people, there are paradoxical expressions. According to (Megersa, 2012) explanations', a tradition held that the Me'en originated in the Gemo Gofa province and lived as pastoralists along the Omo river. According to this tradition, they migrated to their current settlement area primarily for hunting and gathering due to loss of their cattle by the cattle epidemic disease. Another tradition, which appears to be more acceptable to elder members of the people, is that the Me'en came from the Omo River. Nonetheless, it is unclear when they crossed the Omo River and arrived in their current location.

The origins of komorutship can be traced back to the Me'en people's forefathers' arrival in their current settlement areas. As per the data resulted from key informants, the komoruts were descended from their founding father, *Worri*. A komorut's religious-political power was thought to be based on merit rather than personal merit. *Tuma's* will was perceived to be based on divine command. According to the key informants, Komorut was a distinguished individual in many ways, including the foods he ate, the local drinks he drank, and the clothes he wore. All of his characteristics should set him apart from ordinary people. The komorut was said to eat mutton, drink well-prepared traditional honey wine called boke, and wear a shawl around his neck with various decorations made of ivory, iron, and silk. It was believed that he was responsible for the fertility of the land, livestock, and local people. Furthermore, he intervened in prayer between the local people and Tuma in order to bless the land, bring rain during drought periods, stop epidemic diseases, and mediate homicides of inter-clan and other conflicts.

RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION OF ME'EN

Different sources indicated that the Me'en people were mainly practitioners of traditional religious beliefs. They strongly worshiped *Tuma*, a Sky-God who was revered as the source of rain, the fertility of land, women, and cattle, and the creator of natural orders and laws. *Tuma*, according to the Me'en people, can move from place to place. Such locals' perspectives demonstrate Tuma's Universal or omnipresence, in which he is everywhere and no one can

escape from him. Tuma was also regarded as omnipotent, with the ability to do anything. The religious situation of the Me'en people. The majority of Me'en people still practice traditional beliefs. Of the total population of Me'en people, about 49.45% were followers of traditional beliefs, while about 43.46% were Protestant religious followers, and the remaining 5.75% followed Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity (CSA, 2007²).

ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF ME'NIT SHASHA

The four largest ethnic groups reported in Me'nit Shasha were the Me'en, Bench, Amhara, and the Dizi, and all other ethnic groups made up 2.04% of the population. The four largest ethnic groups reported as dominant inhabitants were the Me'en peoples and *Me'en* was spoken as their first language by 87.97% of the inhabitants while around 5.21% spoke Amharic, 3.51% spoke Bench, and 2.91% spoke Dizin and the remaining 0.55% spoke all other primary languages.

Earlier, the Bench Maji Zone consisted of six distinct ethnic groups, namely the Bench, Sheko, Me'en, Dizi, Surma, and Zilmamo. But now, the Bench and Sheko are administered under the Bench-Sheko Zone, making Mizan-Aman town its zonal seat.

While the other four ethnic groups (Me'en, Dizi, Surma, and Zilmamo) are administered under the South West Omo Zone, making Jemu town as its zonal seat.

3.1.3 Socio-demographic characteristics of the study area

Geographically, this Me'nit Shasha was bordered on the south by Maji, on the southwest by Bero, on the west by Guraferda, on the north by Debub Bench and Me'nit Goldiya, on the east by the Keffa Zone, and on the southeast by the Omo River, which separates it from the Debub Omo Zone. Additionally, this woreda is nearly bordered on the west by Gorigesha woreda, on the north by Me'nit Goldia, and on the east by the South Omo zone. The Omo River defines much of its eastern border with Debub Omo. The surface area of the woreda is 1965.90 km. Me'nit Shasha, Era Me'nit, Chat, and Jemu, which are the center of the district and etc., are some of the towns included in Me'nit Shasha woreda (Source; Me'nit Shasha woreda's public communication and Road and Transport Bureau report).

² The researcher used CSA 2007 because there was no updated report on the issue until the study was conducted.

Demographically, the settlement pattern of the Me'en people was unevenly distributed. According to the Central Statistics Agency's (CSA) 2007 report on Me'en population distribution between urban and rural areas, the majority of the Me'en population (94.78%) lived in rural areas with an estimated density of ten people per square kilometer. While only about 5.22% (5,326) of the local people lived in urban areas. Most parts of the Woreda have a tropical agro-climate with 2% Kola, 95% Weinadega and 3% Degas. The general elevation of the woreda ranges from 1500 to 2500 meters above sea level.

3.1.4 Economic Activities of Me'en

The local communities in the study area can be divided into two groups based on their socioeconomic and cultural characteristics: the indigenous Me'enits and settlers from different backgrounds. As Abbink was mentioned, the Me'en crops can be divided in two kinds: first as, the traditional staples maize and sorghum; while the second as, newer root crops, lentils, vegetables, and other plants of the highland zone. These were virtually all adopted in this century (Abbink, 1988³).

Me'en people are still cultivated various food as well root crops. Sweet potato (in Me'en; *dingis'a*), pumpkin (in Me'en: *botoka*), Tobacco (*Dambu*) Pepper (*in Me'en; Minta*), Coffee (*tika*) sugar cane (*olit*), Onion (*S'unhurti*), cabbage (*Ki;not*), Peas (*ater*), *beas* (*be'ara*), *banana*, *tef* (*gac'it*), peanut and other species plants were among the dominantly cultivated at Me'nit Shaha woreda. Also nameless grain in Amharic and English but well identified in among Me'en are there, such as *Ka;tila*, *taro(jon-gac'i)*, *Lo;git* and etc.

The maize (*Weyda*) and sorghum (*Liba*) have been maintained as food crops. Among the Me'en maize or *weyda* is the food par excellence. As a result, in Me'en tradition the main daily traditional food, *boru* (*Porridge*), and their traditional homemade drink which is *sholu* beer are produced from maize. The Sorghum (*Liba*) is less cultivated as compared to maize (*weyda*).

The Me'nit Shasha Woreda is well known economically as it is resourceful because it is a cash crop area. Accordingly, Grain crops and ingredients production are where the environment is

³ The researcher used Abbink 1988 because there was no updated source on the issue until the study was conducted.

known. The major crops grown in the area include mainly coffee, maize, teff, wheat, barley, sorghum, bean, pea and peanut. The major ingredients grown in the area includes; mace, bishop's weed, garlic and onion. Along with agriculture, cattle and livestock still have a special place and significance in the political, economic and social activities of the Me'en community.

As the data gathered from the key informants on this regard stated that, Cattle and livestock are closely associated with the Me'en community through their mourning ceremonies, weddings, bride price, funerals, and other political, economic, and social events.

Though the Me'en peoples are both pastoral and Semi-pastoral community but they are stable pastoralists. They have their own governmental administrative structures, institutions and permanent settlements. Farmers in the area farm with two oxen and use traditional procedures that have always kept production below subsistence. Beside the crop cultivation, the inhabitants also practice, cattle breeding and traditional honey production. From the seven woredas in West Omo Zone, the majority of Me'en communities are dominated in Me'nit Goldiya and Me'nit Shasha Woreda. Of those two Woredas, Me'nit Shasha was selected purposively due to the researcher's familiarity and prior knowledge about the area.

Evidence suggests that since ancient times, the economy of the Maine people has been based on livestock. According to the data sources on this regard, the Me'en people lost their cattle in the last decades of the 18th century due to the incidence of the tsetse fly epidemic diseases. Following this appearance tsetse fly, they moved to the highlands and established themselves in their current territories. Their relocation to the highlands resulted in a shift in their economic activity and livelihood from pastoral to subsistence agriculture. The contemporary location of Me'en highland settlement is convenient for the production of maize, teff, wheat, barley, sorghum, bean, pea and peanut.

3.2 Selection of the research sites

As it was mentioned earlier, the goal of this study was to explore the practice of bride price payment and its impact on gender equality among the Me'en community in Me' nit Shasha Woreda. The study area was located in the newly formulated zone, namely the West Omo zone of Ethiopia's south-western region, particularly in the Me'nit Shasha Woreda. As a result, two Kebele were chosen for this study; *Jemu and Era me 'nit*. These sites were not randomly chosen,

but rather based on a number of considerations. The justification for the selection of the study sites was;

- Me' nit Shasha Woreda was purposefully chosen for this study since the researcher had prior knowledge of the area and the prevalence of bride price practice payment.
- As academicians, the researcher was interested to look at their particular condition and have a say for understandings of such Me'en communities' customary practice and its impact on the women's marital life.
- To sum, it is due to the researcher's familiarity with the area and opportunity to observe their society which is prevalent with gender discrimination.
- Furthermore, the Me'en people are lived in the peripheral area of the country, receiving little attention from the government and NGOs as well as researchers particularly concerning gender issues.

3.3 Research Approach

The study relied on a qualitative research approach with the major aim of generating data on the subjective understanding of Me'en communities' bride price payment practice, exploring the socio-cultural reasons underpinning bride price payment, and ascertaining the perceptions of married women and men about the influence of bride price payment on women's marital life in the study area. Generally, the study was aimed at describing the practice of bride price payment and its impact on gender equality among the Me'en communities.

As it is explained by Creswell (2007), exploration requires going deep into people's day-to-day lives, interactions, and expressions of past experiences that can be better captured through gathering qualitative information. Thus, this method was helpful in obtaining a closer investigation and it was appropriate in order to listen to what people had to say about their real lives. As a matter of fact, the potential for listening was a major advantage of the qualitative method over the quantitative one in this conducted study. Also, Degefa (2006) stated a qualitative research approach is used when the aim of the study is to explore the subjective understanding people have about the contexts which they are living. This research method helped the researcher to obtain the relevant data through closer investigation of the issue, and it was suitable in order to listen to what people had to say about the marriage system, their culture of

bride price practice, ascertain their socio-cultural justification for the practice, and their perceptions of its influence on their marital life.

3.4 Research Design

A research design is defined as being the "procedures for collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data in research studies" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, P.⁵⁸). Similarly, Tesfaye Boru (2018) also explained that it is the overall plan for connecting conceptual research problems with relevant (achievable) empirical research. The qualitative research design varies depending upon the method that the researcher employs; participant observations, in-depth interviews, or focus group discussions. The underlying reason for carrying out any qualitative research is to gain a richly detailed understanding of a particular topic, issue, or meaning based on first-hand experience. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is concerned with establishing answers to the why and how of the phenomenon in question. As cited by Tesfaye Boru (2018), Robson (2002⁴) stated there are three types of research designs: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. His classification is based on the research area's purpose, as each design serves a different end goal.

The study used both descriptive and exploratory research designs depending on the study's respective specific objectives. The researcher used a descriptive design to describe the bride price payment practice and to describe the influence of the bride price payment practice on women's ability to assert their rights. Whereas, exploratory research design was employed to explore the views of married men and women about the influence of bride price payment on women's marital life and to explore the socio-cultural reasons underpinning bride price payment in the Me'en community. As Gray (2004) stated, descriptive studies may ask 'what' kinds of questions, explanatory studies seek to ask 'why' and 'how' questions. Therefore, to provide in-depth information regarding what does the bride price look like in the community, and to explore why the Me'en community practiced this customary practice, as well as to show how the practice impacted women's marital life and to indicate how it can be associated with gender equality, employing both descriptive and exploratory research design was helpful for the researcher in this

⁴ The researcher used Robson 2002 because there was no updated source on the issue until the study was conducted.

study. These qualitative research designs helped the researcher to get in-depth information on the issue under study.

3.5 Sampling Techniques and Procedures

To conduct this study, non-probability sampling, particularly the purposive sampling technique, was employed to take samples from FGD discussants, key informants, and in-depth interviewees. Therefore, participants for the in-depth interview, key informant interview and FGD were recruited purposively, based on the researcher's assumption that the selected individuals would give adequate data on the issues. Purposive sampling allows a researcher to swiftly reach a specific sample. This method saves time, money and effort. It is also adaptable and suits a variety of needs and interests, allowing us to hear a variety of perspectives on the study topic. Furthermore, it enables researchers to pick a sample based on the study's goal and population knowledge. As Babbie (2007) stated, this type of sampling technique enables the researcher to select participants based on knowledge of which ones will be the most useful or representative of those with an in-depth understanding of the issue or topic under consideration. The selection procedure took into account the researcher's prior knowledge of the area and the individuals who are believed to provide rich data on the topic under the study, participants' position or status in the community, convenient accessibility of the participants to the researcher and the other reason is that the participants are married and traditionally paid the bride price.

Both married men and women participants were selected for in-depth interviews from the Me'en community at both kebele. Moreover, discussants for FGD, case study and key informant interviewees were selected from among the community elders, religious leaders, public prosecutors, the Woreda's Women, Children, and Youth Affairs officials, policemen, and the Woreda's culture and tourism experts and health experts. This was helpful for the researcher to acquire a variety of information, which was useful to explore the issue from different perspectives and finally address the general and specific objectives of the study.

The West Omo Zone is divided into seven Woredas, Me'nit Shahsa; Me'nit Goldeya, Gori-gesha Berro, Gachit, Surma and Maji. The study area of this research consisted of sixteen (16) kebeles. Hence, for the purpose of this study, the Me'nit Shaha was targeted because of the researcher's familiarity with the area. Also, it is because the Me'en communities dominantly live in this woreda than the other woredas, then among the sixteen kebeles, the two Jemu and Era-me'nit

were purposefully selected to gather the necessary information and to address the earlier mentioned research objectives. And from these Kebeles to conduct this study, a total of forty-nine (49) respondents participated both in key informant and in-depth interviews, as well as in case study and focus group discussions. These participants came from FGDs twenty-four (24), the fifteen (15) from in-depth interviews, and two (2) from case study participants, whereas the last eight participants were from key informant interviews.

3.6 Methods of Data Collection

3.6.1. Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussions were also used in this study to supplement the data obtained through other methods of data collection. Focus group discussions are more appropriate when group interaction is capable of producing detailed data, new ideas, and illuminating respondents' conflicting viewpoints. During a focus group discussion, data is generated through participant interaction. Participants should put their ideas forward and listen to what others have to say. Participants in such a group setting express their opinions from their point of view.

As stated by Michael et al.(2000) focus group discussions reduced the researcher's (moderator's) influence on participants, which would be possible in individual interviews. To conduct this study, the total of twenty-four (24) participants who did not take part in-depth interview were involved in four focused group discussions at each research sites, each FGD was contained about Six (6) discussants. The compositions of the discussants were homogeneous in terms of sex. The participants of the focus group discussion were selected purposively based on the assumption of the researcher on who are believed to provide rich data on the issue under study.

Married women and men were asked separately. Hence, the homogeneity was helped the informants to talk freely and explained the purpose of bride price payment and their perception towards it, as well as its impact on women's marital life. Data on the description of bride price payment practice as and gender equality, the perceptions of women about the influences of bride price payment on their marital life, the perceptions of men about the influences of bride price on women's marital life and the socio- cultural justifications of the community towards the practice in the study area were generated through employing Focus Group Discussion.

The first FGDs was conducted at Era me 'nit whereas the rest three FGDs were held at Jemu. The first FGD was performed with married women at Era me 'nit. Whereas, the second FGD was conducted with the same married women at Jemu. The third FGD was held in Jemu with the same married men from both kebeles, Jemu and Era me 'nit. The last and fourth FGDs were held in Jemu with the same elected elders and religious leaders from both kebeles, Jemu and Era-me'nit. All FGDs were conducted at a time and place convenient for the participants. The researcher played his role in this regard by raising questions for the participants to discuss, collecting information and holding notes as they spoke.

3.6.2. In-depth Interview

An in-depth interview was used to get the deepest data on the issues under study. To undertake this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected married women and men at both research sites. The size of in-depth interview informants was not predetermined in the research proposal. However, during the course of the study, the number of in-depth interview informants reached fifteen (15). Eight (8) of the fifteen total participants were married women, the remaining seven (7) were married men, and all provided adequate data on the issue. Participants from the Me'en community of both sexes, married men and women, were chosen for interviews. Accordingly, data on the practice, prevalence as well as the socio-cultural justifications for bride price, participants' marriage experience, and data on the perceptions of the married women and men towards the bride price payment practice and its impact on women's marital life in the area was obtained through in-depth interview. Hence, fifteen (15) in-depth informants were interviewed. In this method, the researcher took necessary data by using audio recorder, video recorder, and image viewer and also took field note.

3.6.3. Key Informant Interview

Key informant interviews were held with selective individuals from the community and government employees. In this regard, some knowledgeable individuals who can explain the issue in the best manner under the study were interviewed to generate data concerning the bride price payment and its impact on gender equality, particularly on women's marital life, from the perceptions of women and men.

For this study, the researchers used eight (8) key informants. These came from: two (2) from the women's, children's, and youth affairs office of Me'nit Shasha Woreda; one from the health

office; one from the culture and tourism office; one from Me'nit Shasha Woreda's public prosecutor's office; one from police office, and the last two, community elders of Me'nit people and religious leaders, consecutively were selected in this particular method. Furthermore, the researcher conducted interviews with these concerned groups to gather data on the issues like the influence of bride price payment on women's marital life including on marital stability, violence and freedom and explored their perceptions towards the practice of bride price and its impact on gender equality from the community perspective. Following this, in order to collect data from key informants first, the researcher was prepared and used interview guideline as a tool. Note taking and recording data were also significant at the time of interviewing process. The sampling selection criterion was based on participants who are familiar with the area for a long time and familiar with the issue and able to well discuss the issues under the study.

3.6.4 Case Study

Aimed to generate more in-depth and valid data that fully substantiate the information that was obtained through the other qualitative methods, case study was held with two recently married couples through the tradition, who belongs to Me'en, community. They were obtained by the suggestion of the community elders and these are believed by the researcher that they can elaborate the practice of bride price, describe its impact on their own marital life, mention the experiences of vulnerability of women with in a marriage such as violence and issues of marital stability as a result of bride price, coping strategy of the women and the perception towards the influences of bride price as a whole. Thus, the data resulted from these two-case study was explored and analyzed in order to substantiate data obtained from in depth interview, key informant and focus group discussion.

3.7 Instruments of data collection

To investigate the qualitative data, the researcher was used check lists for FGDs, interview guide lines, Note Books and audio and a video recorder which was mobile recorder were used as an instrument of data collection to collect data from the informants in this conducted research.

3.8 Source of Data

In this study, both primary and secondary sources of data were used to collect data.

3.8.1. Primary sources of data

The primary data was obtained from participants through different methods as in-depth interviews, key informant interview, FGDs and Case studies. Therefore, the primary data sources were in-depth interviewees, key informants, and FGD discussants. Accordingly, to conduct this study the primary sources of data were obtained from married women and men, those who are belongs to Me'en community. FGDs discussants, case study participants and key informant interviewees who were selected from the two kebeles at Me'nit Shasha woreda.

3.8.2 Secondary Sources of Data

Whereas the secondary data were emerged from various reports, document (for instance, written documents or assessment reports made at the woreda level, documents from culture and heritage offices concerning the culture of bride price, short term training manuals, reports, and records were accessed from Me'nit Shasha woreda's women, children and youth affair Office, woreda's council, public prosecutor office, and police office. Beyond this, other published and unpublished materials on the issues of Bride price and its influence on gender equality such as scientific journals, magazines, articles, and other related documents associated with bride price, gender equality and the socio-economic status of women were taken as the secondary data in this conducted study.

3.9 Methods of Data Analysis

The study was used a qualitative method of data analysis. Hence, qualitative data was analyzed by a method of critical reading, textual analysis and thematic analysis. The qualitative data obtained through interview, FGDs, case study, audio and video recording and note taking were transcribed into words, categorized and organized into different categories, based on the objectives of the study and review of related literature. Following this, the categories of the practice of bride price its impact on gender equality, the perception of women and men about the influences of bride price on women's marital life in terms of marital stability, violence and freedom and the socio-cultural factor contributes to the bride price payment, the perceptions of married women and men towards the effects of the bride price payment on the women's marital life was developed from the both informants' response and literatures, also were analyzed using thematic method of data analysis. In sum, as themes was found out, the researcher was put them

on separate headings in the data analysis and discussion section of the study. In order to strengthen the themes, there are also some cases and quotations placed under most of them.

3.10 Trustworthiness

Different methods were used to assure the credibility, dependability, and conformability of the study. The discussions were open-ended and respondents were stimulated to answer the questions in an un-repressed way while being shown to remain focused on the topic of interest, and also comprehensive field notes were kept throughout the research process to provide a thick description of the subject matter. The data were gathered from diverse viewpoints by involving different key informants and participants. The researcher spent more time in the field with participants through face-to-face interviews. Before turning to the succeeding statement, the interviewer was read back to participants. During the investigation, all records and documentation on a day-to-day basis were kept clear and in detail. The responses of participants was taken and quoted as part of the records by the researcher. Each and every data first transcribed in to words and then categorized into different categories based on the research objectives. Then after, the researcher coded the data in to data books. A collection of materials and notes used in the research process that documents the researcher's decisions and assumptions was made.

3.11 Ethical Consideration

Most possible efforts were made to keep the study free from bias, abuse, misconduct, and illegal acts and practices. To do so, the researcher followed the basic ethical principles of scientific research in the processes of data collection, data presentation and analysis. Accordingly, informed consent is one of the most important tools for ensuring respect for persons during research. Hence, the researcher was obtained ethical clearance letter from Jimma University College of Social Sciences and Humanities and the department of Sociology to West Omo Zone, particularly to Me'nit Shasha woreda. Permission was requested from the province administration. To conduct this study, first I introduced myself to the study participants and then participants were informed about the purpose of the study and confirmed the confidentiality of their responses during the research process. This included briefings for non-disclosure of participants' identities and their liberty from any risk that may arise from the study or the

responses. The study has taken input only from the interested participants. I also take audio and video records of participants' voice with their consent. Furthermore, the study acknowledged all contributors in this conducted study and immediately provided proper credit to those scholars, and a list of references was attached. Generally, informed consent was obtained from study participants and the participants were well informed about:

- ❖ The purpose of the research
- ❖ Their freedom from any liability or risk arising from the study or response
- ❖ Their expected roles as a research participant
- ❖ The amount of time likely to be required for participation
- ❖ Expected risks and benefits
- ❖ Their right to withdraw at any time if they found participation to be in convenient

CHAPTER FOUR

4. Result and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter introduces us to the systematic presentation and analysis of field data. The study focused on the practice of paying the bride price and women's and men's perceptions of how it influenced gender equality among the Me'en community in the West Omo Zone, SNNP's Region. In this chapter, the findings are presented with qualitative data presentation, specifically with thematic analysis.

The chapter begins with a general discussion of the participants' characteristics. Accordingly, the participants of the study were married women and men of the Me'en community from both Jemu and Era Me'nit kebeles, elders from the community and religious leaders of Me'en people, and experts from various concerned government departments were directly involved. And then, moves on to present the data about historical background of Me'en people, the practice of bride price, actors and decision making in bride price payment, reasons for pride price payment, the voice of women in bride price payment, bride price payment and marriage. The data related to the consequences of bride price payment, women's view of bride price payment on marriage stability and their rights and the view of men's also considered. This part of the conducted research is also consisted the discussion of major findings in line with previously conducted research findings reviewed in the literature.

These themes are expected to answer the specific objectives of this study, which are describe the practice of bride price payment in the study area, explore the socio-cultural reasons underpinning bride price payment practices, and to explore the perceptions of married women and men about the influence of bride price payment on women's marital life and on women's ability to claim their right. The participants for in-depth interview were fifteen married men and women from both kebeles. All were married and their age was in the range of the following: 15-20, 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50 and above 50. While participants for Key informant interview were came from the community and religious leaders of Me'en community and experts from various governmental institution.

4.1 Marriage System (Gamen) among Me'en People

This section of the chapter is dedicated to presenting informant responses about Me'en community's marriage system, the procedures for their traditional wedding ceremony and participants' marriage experience. This is essential because it highlights what the community's marriage system looks like and its relationship to bride price payment.

Accordingly, key informant interviews and focused group discussions were conducted with community elders, married men and women on the issue like marriage system, whether their own marriage was involved bride price payment or not, and their marriage experience. Almost all of the findings stated that Me'en people's marriages were mostly done in the customary way. As marriage has its own content, meaning, and application, according to local culture and traditions, marriage among the Me'en ethnic group has its own performance system. Based on the data gathered from all community elders and members who are married men and women, it is clear that marriage is highly valued, respected and practiced by the Me'en people. Marriage is also known as 'Gamen' in the Me'en community's language.

As the data gathered from the elderly of Me'en peoples shows, marriage signified not only the union of the two couples to be married but also their families and kinship groups in blood as well as their clans. Bride price payment is said to be the main and priority issue, to perform socially acceptable marriage in among Me'en cultures. One Me'en community elder's response confirmed this above argument as follows:

According to our tradition, marriage is very precious and valuable. This is because it is considered as a means of bonding not only between the two spouses but also between their families and their clans. When two couples get married, their families will be honored. That is why they believe, because of the emergence of marriage, their family will be honored, their family fence will also be respected, and no external enemy will attack their families and relatives. In our culture, marriage creates a special kind of mutual support and maintains mutual dependence between spouses and their families, and relatives as well as their clans. It creates a unique sense of mutual maintenance, especially in times of emergency such as scarcity and starvation. However, to conduct such an acceptable marriage, bride price payment is a very important required part of

our culture. (An elderly man during Key informant interview at Jemu kebele on Jun 31/2021).

Marriage among Me'en people is endogamous, which means that people can marry who come from the same social class or clans. As the data gained from the key informants show among the Me'en people there are no isolated clan groups and there is no exclusion from conducting marriages with any clan groups except a few inferior groups.

The maturity of girls and boys for marriage was also identified using traditional methods in the Me'en community's culture. The traditional method to identify the maturity of boys in among Me'en was the young boys would build a small grass hut called '*Don 'kur*' nearby the main house of their parents, which shows the young people are getting ready to marry before they get married and they hardly cultivate crops which will help them as a basis to pay the bride price. For the boy, this is an indicator for his parents that, he is getting matured and ready to marry a wife. In this case his parents begin to carefully search wife for him outside their locals. Similarly, the focus group discussion conducted with key informants at Era - Me'nit and Jemu revealed the norms for identifying the maturity of girls for marriage in Me'en culture as follows;

Special small grass hut was constructed for girls to isolate herself during menstruation time from her family little far from the main house of her parents. Thus, if two huts were built in the same yard in a given family, then people would easily know that the daughter of that family is matured and ready for marriage.

However, the data gained from the participants reveal that changes are there nowadays; currently, the Me'en ethnic group differs from the other pastoral ethnic groups in rural Ethiopia in that those children, particularly the boys, mostly marry voluntarily or at their own age, by their own choice. Family does not interfere, especially in male choice. While in the case of girls, like most other ethnic groups in rural parts of Ethiopia, women of the Me'en community also have no say as equivalent to their male counterparts, but no one can force them in the selection of their spouses and the timing of their marriages. But they are forced to bring a bride price payment during the marriage. As the data gathered from the key informants shows, marriage among Me'en was implemented when the girls became physically mature and attractive to the males. Therefore, it is possible to see here how, unlike men, women of Me'en people are pressured not to marry in the way that they want and with the guy they love.

Regarding the marriage ceremony, it has its own procedural arrangements, events, and rituals. The traditional marriage ceremony of Me'en was involved in preparing for a traditional drinking party. Among their various traditional homemade local alcohols, the '*Sholu*' (*borde*) and the '*bokee*', which are prepared from maize or sorghum, are the main ingredients, and are the highlights of their marriage ceremonies. And also, "*Boru*" porridge is the dominant traditional food of Me'en, and they make it one of their most memorable meals.

For instance, in the case of an arranged marriage (Shobi to 'oka), the bridegroom's family first began to seek a physically matured and attractive girl (bride) for their son by asking others based on their traditional standards such as the bride's family economic background, the girl's physical attractiveness, behaviors, the girl's strength in cultivation, and her skill in preparations of traditional meals and drinks. Also, the girl's skill of moderation when she prepared those meals and local drinks is one of their traditional criteria. As the Me'en peoples are socially organized based on lineage groups, such arranged forms of marriage take a long time and procedure. Hereafter, when they find the right girl and identify her background, the bridegroom's family selects and sends the "*Damas*" or elders to the bride's family to begin the process of marriage arrangement request. On the first date, the '*damas*' (elders) arrive at the bride family's residence and clarify their aim for their visit, and they confirm what they have heard about the girl along the way.

Then the *damas* (elders) request that the bride's parents offer their daughter to the family who has approached them. After a brief debate is held, both parties schedule a meeting for the following week, and the elders return home. The next day, according to the appointment, the elders return to the girl's family to visit for the second time as scheduled, holding *dambu* (tobacco) and *shata* (something like salt) which was sent from the bridegroom's family, and finally they reach an agreement. The girl's family expresses their willingness to accept the marriage proposal by accepting the gift (the *dambu* or tobacco and *Shata*) which is sent to them through the *damas* (elders). Hereafter, another appointment will be scheduled to discuss the bride price payment (*kela*) or *tilosh*, and then the bride family will still hire the elders for the third time to come up with the bride price. The elders come with the bride price, which mainly consists of a head of livestock about 15 and above (it is estimated at about 60–70 thousand birr in cash), a firearm, and money. Accordingly, the elders arrived at the bride's family home with

what they were promised; mostly the items to be paid for were livestock (*bees*), firearms (*Losha*), and money. Cattles (bee), firearms (Losha), and money are found to be the main and inevitable items needed to conduct any form of marriage among the Me'en peoples.

Generally, during their traditional wedding ceremony, after the damas (the elders) have finished the requested bride price payment to the bride's family, they take the bride and the groom to the bride's family, where the bride is surrounded by these so-called *enkanogits*. The *enkanogits* are a group of the bride's close relatives, and particularly the aunt of the bride is perceived as a principal actor in this ceremony, and finally, the bride's family would in turn give one calf, goat, or cow for their child and one goat for her aunt. Thus, the bride and her husband with their *enkanogit* would stay for at least a week and they would be returned to their home only when the groom's family would give to them gifts in kind.

4.1.1 Marriage experiences of the participants.

Men and women respondents were asked about their marriage experience through in-depth interviews. Therefore, concerning the marriage experiences of the participants, all married women and men who took part in the study described that they were married in a traditional way, which is called "*Shobi to Oka*" (arranged marriage). Almost all of the finding stated that Me'en's marriages were mostly done in the customary way and the me'en peoples perceived that marriage would be blessed with the birth of child, Me'en peoples are socially organized based on lineage groups. As per data gathered from those participants, although marriage is traditionally allowed under family law, it is not known whether marriage can be conducted legally in the Me'en community. This shows that there is a gap in the legal basis for their marriage and that they do not know that they can be legally divorced unless they are legally married.

To find out additional data about their marriage experience, all informants were asked to inform whether their own marriage was involved bride price payment or not, and who chose their fiancé when they got married. Consequently, all informants' first marriage was involved bride price payment. All married male participants in this study stated that they got married by paying bride price payment. Similarly, all married women participant also stated that the bride price was paid to their families at the time of their marriage. Also, almost all first marriages of married both sex participants were formed by their families' willing. Though the participants said their marriage was formed by their own will, the girl's interest in whom, when and how she got married is still

under question. However, to say a marriage is conducted based on the consent between the two spouses; there is no need for any preconditions. Though almost all male participants reported that their first marriage was formed based on their will, all paid off their bride price, and they perceived that it had to be paid. Therefore, it is problematic to say marriage is conducted based on the consensus between the two spouses among these Me'en people. However, in all types of marriages, bride price is a precondition in Me'en traditions.

4.1.2 Forms of Marriage and Bride price among Me'en People

This part of the chapter is devoted to presenting informant's responses about the existing forms of marriage and bride price payment within the Me'en community's marriage system.

Based on the empirical data gained from the key informants, marriage can be conducted in different ways in the Me'en community. Though there are many different forms of marriage among the Me'en people, the '*Shobi to Oka*' (arranged marriage), "*Quren*" (marriage by abduction), "*Qenesen*" (widow inheritance marriage), "*Joren*" (marriage by consent between the two spouses), and polygamous marriage are the most common. The first type of marriage that is arranged ("*Shobi to 'oka*") is among the well-known forms of marriage practice among Me'en people. "*Shobi to 'oka*" is the commonly known type of marriage which is often arranged by a great negotiation between the bride's and groom's parents. Secondly, according to the informant's response, the "Quren" (Marriage by abduction) was found to be the most frequently exercised form of marriage among the Me'en people. It is forcefully conducted marriage through abduction. If a guy wanted to marry her and loved the girl, he would readily abduct her forcefully with his friends and take her to his family's house. It may be conducted with or without her consent. Once the abduction has been made, the bride's family will start to send elderly conciliators and arrange for the bride's price payment to be reconciled with the bride's family. Marriage by Abduction (*Quren*) is a way of marriage conducted by the consent of the bride and groom secretly in Me'en tradition. As the key informants asserted, "*the reason for such forms of marriage are often situations whereby the two couples love each other but when the family disregards their affair, or in those conditions whereby the family questions the economic status of the husband to be... etc*". Deeply, the basic issue with such types of marriage is the lack of economic capacity to pay the bride price

Thirdly, "Qenesen" (widow inheritance marriage) is also among the formally practiced forms of marriage among Me'en peoples. Such a type of marriage is conducted between a widow and the brother or relatives of a deceased husband in the form of an inheritance. The data gathered from the informants described that, in Me'en's tradition, if the married elder brother passes away, his little brother or relative, such as an uncle, inherits his wife as a form of inherited wife or marriage, as long as the bride price is paid off.

Fourthly, polygamous marriage (a man with multiple wives) is found among the other forms of marriage among Me'en people. This is descended from cultural forms of marriage that came from the "Komoruts" (literally, balabbats, "rain chief"). This type of marriage is formed when a man marries several wives at a time. Among the Me'en people, such types of marriage are perceived as common as long as the men are capable of paying the bride price to the bride's family. As the informants stated, marrying several wives is perceived as a sign of being wealthy, a manifestation of respect, and is believed to be a means of getting many children.

Lastly, a rarely practiced form of marriage among the Me'en people is known as "joren". Such a type of marriage is formed based on the agreements of the two couples without the authorization of their families. In this case, there is no involvement of the parents from either side. However, its prevalence is very low. The data gained regarding this indicated that this form of marriage is formulated by the efforts of the young boys. To do this, they select the girls that they want to marry at cultural events, wedding ceremonies, or in the market place. This is similar to what was mentioned by (Dereje and Muluneh) this type of marriage can happen when a boy loves a girl. It is stated that the boy would select the girl at a certain ceremony, such as a wedding, or at a market place among Me'en people. The FGD discussant at Jemu Kebele and key informant interviewees at Era-Me'nit explained the matter in the same way, as follows:

Previously, Shobi to 'oka' was the dominant type of marriage in our community, which is habitually arranged by the parents of the bride and groom. Nevertheless, such a kind of marriage is prevalent only in the remote areas of our woreda, particularly around the Kolla regions. Because the youths of today, particularly boys, cannot accept the choice of their parents, they select the girl that they want to be with them at their wedding or at the market place, and they are going to marry the girl that they want to marry and love through abduction. Accordingly, the Quren is becoming the leading frequently practiced

form of marriage among me'en people after a long time. Rarely the joren is also happening nowadays, especially among the educated youth. However, until the bride price is not paid and the negotiation is not made, the spouses may have not smooth relationships with their families, particularly with the families of the bride. (Elders during FGD at Jemu kebele on Jun 31/2021 and Key informants during key informant interview at Era me'nit on July/2021).

According to the data available so far, there is a bride price payment in all types of marriages and in the culture of the Me'en community, bride price is the most important prerequisite issue in establishing any acceptable forms of marriage.

4.2 The Practice of Bride Price Payment (*Kela*) among Me'en people

The researcher first described primarily the title and aim of the research to the informants and consequently to meet the first objective of this conducted study, both married men and women informants and the key informants were asked separately to report questions like whether bride price payment is practiced in the community, and what was the items paid as bride price at their own marriage the (value of bride price payments at the time of marriage). So, this part deals with the definitions, prevalence, items paid off as forms, and practices of the bride price payment in among Me'en.

According to the data resulted from the informants, the bride price payment in among the Me'en People is known as *Kela*, or informally they call it (*Tilosh*). The bride price payment ('*Kela*') in among Me'en has deep historical roots and highly appreciated cultural practice used to validate their customary marriages. It is a key component and requirement of the marriage contract in all the Me'en community's marriage traditions. *Kela* is an important prioritized issue for the local community to conduct marriage, according to the Me'en people's culture.

The finding reveals that, the practice of bride price payment is profoundly prevalent among all community members of Me'en in Me'nit Shasha woreda, particularly at Jemu and Era Me'nit. To justify these key informants from me'en community mentioned how the practice is historically rooted, appreciated and interlinked with marriage as follow;

According to our tradition, when it comes to marriage in mind, it is important and must to think about the bride price payment. In our Me'nit culture, bride price payment or

bridal gift is known as kela in the language of the nation, and it is a tradition that has been around since ancient times. However, the amount varies according to the person's ability to pay. (Key Informants at Jemu kebele on Jun /2021).

Similarly, the data gathered from all FGD participants at Era me'nit also confirmed the above data. These participants explained that, according to the Me'en culture, the bride price payment and marriage are inseparable and are two sides of the same coin. Among Me'en community *Kela* (bride price payment) is referring to common forms of wealth paid such as money, cattle and firearms, paid by the bride groom or groom's family to the bride's family (to the family of the girl he will be married to or is just about to marry) in the time of marriage. In this conducted study, both married men and women informants were asked to respond whether bride price payment is practiced in the community, so they informed that the customary practice of bride price payment (*Kela*) at the time of marriage among Me'en people was found to be exceedingly prevalent, and it is perceived as a custom that has deep historical roots and is widespread over all the community.

Lastly regarding the items, the data gained from both men and women were found much more similar. Based on this both informants mentioned that the commonly items that was paid at their own first marriage were primarily livestock (*bee*), firearms (*Losha*) and money (*Qorsha*). Though the cattle (*bee*), firearms (*losha*) and money are found the main and the inevitable items to conduct marriage in among the Me'en peoples. But they informed that, following the implementation of regulation drafted by the Me'nit shasha Woreda's Council to control unbalanced payment of bride price, nowadays the previous payment for firearms is converted into cash.

Though they are informed that the payment of firearms (*losha*) has been changed to cash at the moment, on the other hand, as some key informants state, the payment for the firearms is still secretly paid in the community and is called '*Fajo*'. *Fajo* means at night in the language of the Me'en. Based on the data resulted from these key informants, as the payment of firearms (*losha*) is currently punishable by law passed by the Woreda's Council, nowadays the payer and receiver of the bride price (the bridegroom and the bride's family) negotiate in secret and receive the firearm at night in the dark.

4.2.1 Actors and Decision Making in Bride Price Payment Process

In this study, participants were asked to identify the main actors in the bride price payment process, as well as who will or will not be directly involved in the decision-making process. Accordingly, the bride's family, the elders and the bride groom's family, as well as the groom himself, are directly involved in the bride price payment process and are oversee the negotiations. An elderly man's explanations stated below approve this as follow:

According to our tradition, the bride price payment can be paid by the bridegroom or his family before and after the bride leaves her family home, but the process is the same. When the elders come to the bride's family house to request the marriage proposal, the bride's family asks if they can afford the bride price, and then the negotiations begin. In the same way, after the bridegroom sends his elders, he will pay if he can afford it. Otherwise, the father of the bridegroom, or his older brother, and if they are not alive, then the uncle and other close relatives will lead the negotiations. (An elderly man during key informant interview at Jemu kebele on Jun /2021)

The finding shows that the bride price payment procedures discriminated against women and mothers in its decision-making process. Concerning the procedures for the bride's price payment, the data resulted from informants' exploration, first, the groom's family sends the elders (damas) to the bride's family with some *dambu* (tobacco) and *shata* (substance, something like salt to start the negotiations. Hereafter, at the first appointment, the bride's father would gather the bride's older brother, her uncles, and other close relatives, and then they would wait for the elders. Then the bride's father and the rest of the family accept the tobacco and *shata* from the elders and express their willingness to negotiate. After much debate can be held on both sides regarding the amount of the bride price, finally, the elders come up with the requested bride price payment, which mainly consists of a head of livestock about fifteen (15) and above (it is estimated at about 60 – 70 thousand birrs in cash), a firearm, and money. The finding shows that, it was recognized that women were not involved in this process. This is a clear indication of how much masculine dominance is in the bride price payment process and how much men are just leading actors.

In this conducted study, when the researcher examines the control and ownership of bride price items and processes, masculinity and gender are also revealed. It is true that, as a result of the

social structure that promotes male dominance, men are often forced to control bride price property in the same way that they control other household resources. For example, during price negotiations, mothers and girls are not permitted to participate or even be present in the decision-making process. As the participants stated that, it is only perceived as men's responsibility. Therefore, it is indeed a bride price is one manifestation of the patriarchal system in society's social structures and cultural practices.

4.3 Reason for Bride Price Payment among Me'en community.

This sub-section deals with the socio-cultural motives for the practiced bride price at the time of marriage among Me'en. Questions like what are the socio-cultural reasons underpinning bride price payment practices among Me'en and what are the meanings attached bride price payment by the community were raised for participants.

Accordingly, all the married women and men, as well as the religious and community leaders who belong to Me'en at both Jemu and Era-me'nit, provided their own reasons for the socio-cultural motives for the practiced bride price. Following this, as the data resulted from participants revealed that there are various cultural, social, economic and spiritual justifications for the practice of bride price during marriage among Me'en people. Accordingly, bride price payment at the time of marriage is a deeply founded and highly appreciated cultural practice among the Me'en ethnic groups. As a result, it is a prerequisite for validating or societal legitimacy for any marriage, and it is frequently explained by numerous socio-cultural grounds among the Me'en people.

This study revealed that bride price payment among Me'en is supposed to be a gift from the bridegroom or his family to the bride's family to say thank you! For the care they gave to their daughter, and it is also believed to be a means of compensation for her family for the cost that they spent when rearing her all over her life and a means of transferring assets from parents to children in the form of an offering. Socially, the majority of the participants revealed that the reason why community practices this customary bride gift is, because it is perceived that it is desired for social security and increased status among peers and community members. In general, the amount of money or material gifts exchanged and the value attached to them by the community were symbolic of what the girl was worth and as a gift to show gratitude for the bride's family. Also, it is because that gift exchange is perceived to increase the prestige of the

couple and their respective relatives as well as clans, and they see the practice as a means of expanding their own clans in their locality. Additionally, the community believes the bride price payment creates healthy, long-lasting relationships and mutual assistance between the two couple's families. As the key informants said, if the bride price is not paid, there will be a disagreement between the two couple's family. They may kill each other; it may lead to loot property and burn down houses. The data gained from one of the community elder man and religious leader of Me'en justified this;

One of the reasons why the Me'en peoples are practiced the bridal fee is to establish good and long-lasting relationships between the families of the two couples. There is no peace, contact, greeting, or mutual assistance between the two spouses' family if the payment is not made. It may lead to a conflict between the two families, with the bride's family may attempted to pinching their daughter or to steal the groom's family of their assets. (An elderly man who is religious leader from key informant interview at Jemu in July /2021).

Economically, based on the data gathered from both sex participants in this regard shown that, the economic motive was identified as the primary reason for the existence of bride price in the study area. Accordingly, all participants commonly reported that the Me'en community perceived the bride price as a means of compensation to the bride's family for the cost that they spent when rearing her all over her life. In addition to the social and economic reasons given to the bride price payment, the Me'en community still has its own religious explanation towards the bride price payment. Religiously, though there are changes concerning the religious aspects of Me'en, traditionally, marriage without bride price payment was perceived as unblessed and unsustainable so far. Paying the bride price payment and slaughtering one heifer/cow at a time of marriage to the aunt of the bride and giving one heifer to the traditional spiritual leaders out of the payment is believed to give a healthy, peaceful life, long age and give a child to the couples.

4.4 Roles of Women in Bride Price Payment

As per the data gathered from the informants, whether they understand it or not, women indirectly play a significant role in the bride price payment process in the Me'en culture.

According to the data resulted from the married men informants, women indirectly play an important role in promoting and expanding the practice of bride price payment in the Me'en ethnic group.

According to the data resulted from the informants, women indirectly play a significant role in promoting and expanding the practice of bride price payment in the Me'en ethnic group. The response of one participant below confirms this;

According to our Me'en culture, if a man loves a woman and wants to marry her, the woman's response will be to "go ahead and pay a bride price payment to my family first." The woman will not accept the marriage proposal unless the man promises to pay the bride price payment. (Key Informants at Era-me'nit kebele on Jun /2021).

In Me'en tradition, when women are asked to marry, they first consider the payment of the bride price to their families. Indeed, women's roles are critical in the spread and continuation of the practiced bride price payment culture.

This is an outcome of their socialization process. In the Me'en culture it is stated that, women are told that they should marry only a man who can pay the bride price to their family when they grow up. They believe that the bride price must be paid in order to get married based on what they are told, seen, and heard as they grow up. Accordingly, Me'en women play an important role in paying bride price, as they grow up thinking that the man, they are marrying must be able to pay the bride price to their family. One married woman stated this issue as below:

Starting from our family to our community, we are taught to marry someone who pays a sufficient bride price to our family. Our family tells us that they deserve the bride price payment because they raised us, and we think it is our tradition. When we grow up, we think we should only marry a man who can pay the bride price. As a result, we always think of marrying a man who can pay the bride price for our family. (Married women at Jemu kebele from in-depth interview, July /2021 married woman).

In this study, women were asked why the bride price was paid and how the women themselves viewed the payment. Their response to the role of women in the implementation and continuation of the dowry is proof enough that their role is significant. As a result of the data gathered from the majority of married women at both Jemu and Era-me'nit, it appears that they

perceived the payment of the bride price as a means of recognizing their husband's regard and affection for them and their family. They responded that the bride price is a way of understanding their husbands' respect and love towards them and their families. One in-depth interviewee, for example, expressed her opinion as below:

If the payment is not made, I feel inferiority, I lack my prestige and I am also embarrassed in front of my friends. Not only this, but also, how can I be supposed to know whether he loves me and respects my family or not, if he cannot pay the Tilosh (bride price) to my parents? (Old married women at Jemu from in-depth interview, July /2021).

Therefore, the above stated woman's response confirms the above idea. Furthermore, in order to better understand how women's voices sound in the practice of bride price payment, both men and women were asked about the total value or amount of the bride price paid in their own marriages. Both the husband and wife were asked separately. Almost all of the participants were requested to remember the bride price including the items, and the total amount of the bride price. Thus, the majorities of married women have less information on the amount since they are not spenders and are excluded from the process. They informed that they remembered it was paid for their family, including the items, but they didn't know the total amount of the bride price. In contrast, their male counterparts were found to have better information on the total amount or value of the bride price in their own first marriages because they were the ones who made the payment and who were directly involved in the transfer of funds (sometimes with the help of their families).

4.5 Influences of bride price payment on Gender equality

This sub-section is dedicated to presenting empirical data resulting from informants' responses about the outcomes of bride price payment on gender equality and its impact on the whole society particularly on women's rights in the Me'en community.

To do this, both married men and women, religious and community leaders of Me'en, and key informants were asked to answer the possible outcomes of the bride price payment and its influence on the marital life's of Me'en' community. Accordingly, although the Me'en n community has its own socio-economic reasons for bride price payment, it is understood that bride price has many consequences, especially for women's rights.

To understand how much bride price payment is the cause of various problems in the Me'en community and how this is being done to reduce its impact, it is better to look at the rules of the Me'nit Shasha Woreda Council. In its preceding chapter, the Kela (Tilosh) regulation drafted by the Me 'nit shasha Woreda Council to control unbalanced payment of bride price describes how the culture of bride price is a deep-rooted practice among Me 'nit people and how difficult it is to eliminate it completely, as well as its impacts on the community at large as follow;

The amount of bride price being paid in different kebeles and individuals in our woreda is inconsistent and overpaying, which means that when young people fail to pay high bride price payment, they are forced to flee the area, for robbery and to commit other serious crimes. Accordingly, what makes different in Me'en culture is when a man and a woman are got married, more than 15 head of cattle and one (1) firearm were paid according to the ethnic tradition. This is estimated that it will be at least about 60-70,000 birr when it will be converted into cash. Therefore, it is necessary to limit the amount of bride price payment to be paid by the Me'en communities and individuals. Accordingly, the council has decided that after a man and a woman agree to get married, the amount of bride price to be paid for the girl's family should not be more than 8 (eight) head of cattle and 5,000 (five thousand) birrs, based on the communities' tradition (Me'nit Shasha woreda council Office Rule, No.02/1731/2012).

Bride price payment has its own negative influence on the young men who want to get married, on the marital life of women, as well as on the wider society as a whole. From the participants' viewpoints in this study, it is clear that the bride price is exerting a lot of social, political, and economic pressure on the whole social group among Me'en community.

In general, from participants' view of point in this study, it was stated that if young men want to get married and are unable to pay the bride price payment and their families are not financially able, due to this, the young people will be involved in various crimes and this will lead to various security problems in the community. Although bride price payment is said to have various effects on society, it is said to be more severe than any other part of society and has a greater impact on women's lives.

4.5.1 Positive Influences of bride price payment

To find out the positive impacts of bride price among Me'en community, participants were asked to provide the benefits of bride price payment in the community. Based on the cultural, social, and economic reasons and explanations provided by the participants, it is understood that bride price payment has its own benefits in the Me'en community.

The following reasons, as expressed by different methods in the data set of members of the community regarding to the positives impact of bride-price, were typical of those expressed: culturally they perceived as it is symbolic of what the girl is worth and as a gift to say thank you!, for the bride's family. Socially, that they perceived it increases prestige of the couple and their respective relatives as well clans and see the practice as a means of expanding their own clans at their locals. Additionally, the reason that the community believed the bride price payment creates healthy long-lasting relationships and mutual assistance between the two families. The reason behind is that economically, it creates a fair distribution of wealth and economic support between the family and the relatives. Because, for example, in Me'en culture, if a young man wants to get married and cannot afford a bride price payment, the father, if there is an older brother, the older brother; if the family can't afford it, another relative can help or pay it. Also, it promotes the hard-working habits of the young people. These the above listed and other reasons, as expressed by different methods in the data set of participants, regarding the positive impact of the bride-price are indicators of the benefits of bride price payment in the Me'en community.

4.5.2 Bride price payment practice and its influence on women's rights.

4.5.2.1 Bride Price, Women's Property Right and Gender Equality

According to the data gathered from the informants, the women's property rights in Me'en can be divided into two. That is, as long as they are in the marriage and after the marriage.

In this regard, the data shows that Me'en women have the right to manage property equally with their husbands as long as the bride price is paid and they stay within the marriage. But if for some reason, the woman leaves the house, she can remarry, but she cannot come back and ask for property or share. Here the following data resulted from the participant more justified this;

According to our tradition, after the bride price is paid to the bride's family, the woman has the right to order the property equally as long as she is in that marriage. But for example, if she doesn't want to sustain the relationship and if she leaves her home, she can't have the right to ask for property. (Married man at Jemu from In-depth interview July /2021).

It was stated that, in fact, if the husband loves his wife very much, if she gives birth to many children, and if she is a hard worker, he consults her first when he wants to sell any property or even wants to give it to someone. But if she does not meet these requirements, then all of this will not be possible. This is contrary to what is discussed under the revised Family Code of Ethiopia in its Article 90. This article makes it clear that both spouses have the same right to share in joint property after marriage. *Article 90. (I) Partition of Common Property. Without prejudice to the provisions of the preceding Articles and agreements entered into by the spouses, common property shall be divided equally between the spouses* (Revised Family Code of 2000, Article 90/2000). This bride price practice is also in violation of various international, regional, and national legal instruments. For instance, the UDHR states that everyone has the right to equality with respect to marriage and owning property. It states under its article (16) clearly; *Men and women of full age have the right to marry and have children without regard to race, nationality, or religion. They are entitled to equal rights in marriage, during marriage, and after divorce* (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948/16).

Due to the payment of the bride price, according to Me'en culture, women's property rights are based on preconditions. For instance, the following data that gathered from community elders and married men similarly more justified this as follow;

If a woman does not leave her house under any circumstances, if she is able to have more children, she has an equal right to her property. But for example, if she leaves home and says she can remarry, but she does not have the right to claim or share property. On the other hand, similarly, if the woman refuses to accept the marriage during the inheritance, she will be returned to her family home without sharing the same property if she does not have children while living with her deceased husband.

In the Me'en community, men set requirement for women's property rights just because they have paid a bride price. As a result, Me'en women have lost their constitutional right to

unrestricted use of property rights. Their full rights of property are in the hands of others due to this practice. Therefore, it is still possible to recognize that there is a patriarchal domination that exists in the community. To make it brief, due to the payment of the bride fee, men get to put preconditions over women's access, control, administration, and enjoyment of their property rights. The only reason is that they are the ones who spend the bride fee. So, this practice has still cemented gender equality, negatively influencing women's marital life.

This is clearly consistent with what social feminism theory advocated that gender inequality as the inevitable consequence of capitalist economic system serve as the foundation of patriarchal system. In capitalist system, gender-based division of labor is deliberately established to benefit men and disadvantage women. Men own means of production and their works have monetary value. In contrast, women are restricted to domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, child caring and so on that do not usually have direct monetary returns. These gave men an advantage of making decision on family affairs as they are regarded as bread winners. Men of Me'en community; as the spenders of the bride price own means of production as well as women's property right, gender-based division of labor and take supremacy over decisions makings and other issues.

Therefore, socialist feminism was very important to conduct this research because it gave an insight to explore the socio-cultural factors that serve as the foundations of bride price payment. Exactly speaking, this theory was advanced our understandings of the rational why do men pay bride price to marry women? It was also enabled the researcher to explore the contribution of women in economic aspects and their power to command it.

4.5.2.2 Bride Price; Marriage Stability and Gender Equality.

The other attempt of this paper was to ascertain the impact of bride price on marital stability at the study area. Based on the data gathered from both in-depth and key informants, bride price payment is found associated with positive impacts on marital stability in among Me'en traditional marriage. In Me'en culture, once a marriage takes place and the bride is paid, no one can divorce. As the key informants responded; "*divorce is strictly forbidden in Me'en tradition*". This clearly confirms that divorce is not permissible among the Me'en community until now.

Me'en people did not practice and even did not know about divorce. When a person married, he or she would marry for life. Even if the marriage relationship is not happy, there is no chance of divorce. There was not even a term describing divorce in the Me'en language until very recently. This helped with the establishment of marriage stability within the Me'en people. However, just because there is no divorce does not mean that, there is a completely stable family. Because the absence or non-divorce forces Me'en women to be trapped in unhappy marriages as long as the bride price has been paid for their families. A stable marriage can be interpreted in two ways. The first is when couples are unhappy, and even if their relationship is not good, they can live together for a long time without being divorced. The second is when the couple lives together in peace, joy, love, and care without being divorced. The Me'en community claims that they have stable marriage was by imprisoning women, through paying bride prices for their families, and making a condition for women not to get divorced, even if they are unhappy in their marital life. The data gained from the Key informants confirms this as follow;

In the Me'en culture, even if a woman accidentally leaves her home after being married and wants to marry someone else, her new fiancé must repay the bride price to her ex-husband that has been paid for her family when she got married her first husband. She will not be able to remarry and start a new life unless her new second husband repays the bride price, which was paid to her family by her first husband. (Resulted from Key informant interviews at Jemu on July/2021).

Therefore, in the Me'en community, the absence of divorce as a community can be good in terms of creating a stable society. But on the other hand, the bride price payment deprived women of the right to divorce. And also, it trapped Me'en women into staying in unhappy relationships even if they don't want to stay, as far as the bride price had been paid for their families. To say that a marriage is stable, it must be based on mutual agreement and consent of both partners. Men and women have equal rights when entering into, during, and after marriage.

To understand this concept, it is necessary to observe the 1995 Ethiopian Constitution and the revised Family Code of 2000, because they give more insight into what would be and how marriage could be formed and sustained. For instance, the 1995 FDRE Constitution under article 34 sub-article one (1) and two stated that,

Men and women of any race, nation, nationality, or religion who have reached the marriageable age as defined by law have the right to marry and start a family. They have equal rights when entering into, during, and after marriage. Sub article 2 also specified, "Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses."(Article 34/1, Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation No. 1/1995).

When we come to the revised family code of Ethiopia, Article four (4) allows customary marriage. Based on this revised family code of Ethiopia, marriage should be conducted through three forms. The first one is marriage before civil status, the second is religious marriage, and the third one is customary marriage. Accordingly, in this family code, Article four (4) stated about marriage according to custom. It says;

Marriage shall take place according to custom when a man and a woman have performed the rites deemed to constitute a valid marriage by the custom of the community in which they live or by the custom of the community to which they belong or to which one of them belongs.

The family code still says to go down to Article six (6) also underlined about consent. It states that, “*a valid marriage can only take place if both spouses give their free and full consent*’.

(Revised Family Code Proclamation No. 213/2000)

Although the law states that men and women have equal rights before and after marriage, and that marriage should be based on mutual consent of both spouses. However, women of Me'en community are trapped into staying in unhappy relationships even if they were unhappy in their marital lives, as long as the bride price had been paid for their families. The main reason for not divorcing is the payment of bride price and as a result the community has set preconditions for marriage that deprived the women.

Therefore, it is difficult to conclude that there is stable marriage in Me'en community as long as there is no mutual consensus between the two spouses and the community has set prerequisites for the divorce. Because consensus is a means, it cannot be an end by itself. Hence, this research can conclude that a marriage should be based on the goodwill of both spouses and without setting any prerequisites.

4.5.2.3 Bride Price and Gender Violence

Bride price payment is also associated with violence. There are so many forms of violence and it has so many implications. However, as evidence from participants indicated, due to the bride price payment, Me'en women are subjected to various forms of violence in the marriage, ranging from threats, beatings, to murder or death. This idea is supported by the following interview results:

In the Me'en community, once the bride price is paid, the men consider the women to be the ones who bought them and put a lot of burden on them. For example, women are evicted from their home, forced to have more children as long as the bride price payment is paid, and they do the outside work themselves. In this society, women do not have the same rights as their husbands in terms of themselves, their property. (Women Key Informant Interview resulted from Women, Children and Youth Affairs expert at Jemu conducted on July /2021).

In Me'en culture, after a woman gets married, some expectations are attached to her status. For instance, among their expected roles are: giving many children as her husband wants and until she becomes barren, she cannot divorce her husband, and she is expected to do the outside work and feed the whole family as long as the bride price is paid to her family. According to the Women, Children and Youth Affairs experts expression in this regard, it was not uncommon for Me'en women to be reported to have been abused in the past. However, they said that; *"through the awareness campaigns we are working with various concerned government bodies, women are now coming to our institution when they have faced harassment in marriage."* Like many other patriarchal communities, the Me'en women had little or no say in all matters of their family and community, as well as aspects of the Me'e community were dominated and controlled by the male members of the group. This can be justified by the fact that decision-making power in all aspects of Me'en life is in the hands of males. One of the key informants clearly described the situation as follows:

Although the community says girls are valued, precious, and respected, it is because those women are seen as a source of income. A man with many daughters is considered as a rich in this area. The reality in this area, however, is that Me'en women once paid a bride price and got married, and men control everything. Once a woman has been paid a

bride price paid to her family, and married, she has no rights over herself, her property, or even over her children. Generally, because of the low status or credit towards women among Me'en people, women didn't think that they had the right to property within marriage. (Women Key Informant Interview resulted from Women, Children and Youth Affairs expert at Jemu conducted on July /2021).

As a result, women of Me'en were subjected to threats, beatings, and evictions from their homes as a result of the bride price. Furthermore, evidence of the eviction of women from their homes can be seen in the application as follow; Application presented to the SNNPRS' West Omo Zone, Me'nit Shasha Woreda's Women Children and Youth Affair office dated 20/08/2013 E.c, with registration number 414/ቤሀ ወ/115.

Case 1: Issues concerning the eviction of the wife from the home; Applicant Mrs. "A" and defendant Mr. "B" were married and lived together, and they were able to have six children while they were living together, but the person who expelled her from her house for no good reason, threatening to kill her outside the house. And she humbly asked for the help she needs from them. (Data resulted from Me'nit Shsha woreda's Women Children and Youth Affair off office).

Likewise, regarding threats and intimidation, it is possible to see the application below as evidence. In a case submitted to the SNNPRS' West Omo Zone, Me'nit Shasha Woreda's Women Children and Youth Affair office dated 13/09/2013E.c, with registration number 442/07/13.

Case 2, Issues deemed to be threats and intimidation against the wife; Applicant 'X' has been married to Mr. 'Y' since 2008 and they have been able to have three children, but two months ago he threatened her with a knife and tried to kill her. As far as the bride price is paid off to the bride's family men has dominant power over their wife's. Since she is still being threatened, she humbly requests that he be held accountable before the law. (Data resulted from the Women, Children, and Youth Affair office of the Me'nit Shsha woreda)

In addition to the threat and intimidation of women's lives, bride price payment was understood to be one of the reasons why they lose their lives or being caused for their death.

Although the bride price payment is said to have a positive effect on creating a stable family, in the Me'en culture, a woman cannot request a divorce as long as the bride fee is paid to her family. As a result, women cannot ask their husbands for a divorce, and even if they do, they can be killed. The data received from the Me'int Shasha woreda Prosecutor adequately illustrates this. In a case submitted to the Me'nit Shasha Woreda's first instant court office dated 14/03/2013 E.c, with registration number of 0026/003/2018.

Case 3, A case between the West Omo Zone Public Prosecutor and Mr. B

Issues: About the crime of murder; Defendant intentionally attempted to kill a man on August 17, 2012, in the village of Gonolok, at Me'nit Shasha Woreda, for the reason that 'why she did request for divorce?' on the grounds that his wife, Mrs. 'Y', had first stoned her head, injured her, and then she went to his family's home to save her life. The husband was angry with her for asking for a divorce because he had paid the bride price for her family. While the defendant was running with and followed her. Finally, he was stabbed his wife by spear and his wife had pass away. Finally, the court found him guilty and sentenced him to 15 years in prison.

Additionally, as the data gathered from key informants, bride price payment was found associated with different crimes at the study area. Among the various committed crimes murder, physical violence, robbery and theft are the commonly crimes associated with bride price. As the detective police man from the Me'nit shasha woreda's police Bureau stated; *'bride price payment was becoming a source of different security problems and crimes in the area even before and after the bride price payment'*. Accordingly, based on the data in this regard, robbery and theft are the dominant crimes mostly committed by youngsters before the bride price was paid in the area. While murder and various physical violence are among the frequently committed crimes after the bride price has been paid in the study area. Again, to confirm this data, the detective police man from the Me'nit shasha woreda's police office detailed the issue as follow;

"Prior to the payment of the bride price, a crime of robbery and theft is common. This is because the young people, especially those with low incomes or who

cannot afford the bride price payment, committed to robbery and theft to pay the bride fee as long as they do not have cattle to conduct marriage. Similarly, after the bride price is paid, it is the cause of physical assault and murder''

Furthermore, even we look at the main reason behind the draft which was implemented by Me'nit Shasha woreda's council, at its first respective sentences; it justified this information likewise. It says;

በወረዳችን በተለያዩ ቀበሌዎች እና ግለሰቦች እየተከፈለ ያለው የጥሎሽ መጠን ወጥ ያልሆነ እና ከአቅም በላይ ክፍያ የሚፈጽም ሲሆን ይህ ደግሞ ወጣቱን የማህበረሰብ ክፍል ከፍተኛ የጥሎሽ መጠን መክፈል ሲያቅተው ለዝርፊያ እና ከአከባቢው እንዲሰደዱ እንዲሁም ለከፍተኛ ወንጀል እየተዳረገ ይገኛል። This can be approximately translated as

.....The amount of bride price being paid in different kebeles and individuals in our woreda is inconsistent and overpaying, which means that when young people fail to pay high bride price payment, they are forced to flee the area and commit serious crimes. (Me'nit Shasha woreda council Office Rule, No.02/1731/2012)

In the case of bride price payment and violence, amazingly, bride price payment has led to various forms of violence against women and at the same time it appeared caused to the women themselves have committed various crimes. According to the data gathered, men, as long as they pay the bride price, they put various pressures on women at home. Then, when the women are unable to cope with this pressure, they commit various crimes, such as killing their husbands. The one public prosecutor from Me'nit Shasha expressed that, *'For example, as the pressure on the home intensifies, they inflict various injuries and murders on their husbands or other family members.'* Furthermore, the documented evidence received from the West Omo Zone's high Court is presented as follows; In a case submitted to the West Omo zone's first instant court office dated 12/10/2013 E.c, with registration number of 0039/006/2021.

Case 4; Case between Defendant X and West Omo Zone public prosecutor

Issues; It deals with the commission of a murder, Details of the crime. Defendant, Mrs. X, and her husband, Mr. Y, married traditionally by involving bride price payment to her family; Defendant Mrs. X repeatedly beat by her husband and discriminated by family because she was ill. When she could not bear the beating of her husband and the isolation of his family, she disappeared and returned to her father's house, but her father did not accept her because he received bride price from her husband and her father also evicted her; Then she returned to her husband's house, but things did not change. And her husband frequently thought her *'though I paid all this bride price for your family but you are later with health problems'*, as she can unable to cope this, Mrs. X angrily killed her husband's sister. Finally, the court found her guilty and sentenced her to 18 years in prison.

The Other data shown that the; the Me'en women, even though they are old enough to get married, they go with and marry a man who is much older than them to receive the bride price. Data resulted from men and women key informants at both sites shown that women of Me'en community had led difficult situations because of the prevalence of bride price payment. They presented because of the misguided meaning that attached to the bride price payment practice, the women are exposed to various problem. Rich men and those who could afford a high bride price were perceived as more eligible as marital partners as long as they paid the bride price, accordingly Me 'en women are marry to older men. One key informant put it below:

'The community don't much worry about bride groom's age because they perceived these traditional practices as a means of income generating for themselves and as a result, in Me'en community our women are forced to go with older men those who could afford a high bride' (from key informant, at Jemu on Jun, /2021)

Generally, bride price in among Me'en community found greatly associated with physical violence, murder, robbery, theft, abduction and other IPV both before and after the payment. As a result, women of Me'en are subjected to threats, beatings, and evictions from their home as a result of bride price payment. As a result of bride price Women of Me'en are exposed to for excessive labor exploitation both indoors and outdoors, caused women to have mor children, physical violence and so forth. Therefore, unlike the rest of the community members, it can easily understand that how much women are more affected by this problem than the others.

Additionally, beyond the lives of the women in the community it is appeared as sources of becoming a source of different security problems and crimes in the area even before and after the bride price was paid. So, it can understand that this the practice of bride price has negatively affect the efforts to gender equality and creates great difference among men and women gender roles with in the marriage in the study area.

This can briefly consistent with what intersectionality theory have advocated. Intersectionality theory stressed to analyze peoples' problems and, experiences from a multidimensional point of view which guards against the danger of being monolithic and shallow in inquiry. It looks at the interaction of multiple and intertwined identities, experience, exclusion, subordination or oppression. It advocated that; other than focusing on gender as a singular entity, it goes further to focus on issues of difference, diversity among women and also men.

The practice of bide price varies from social context to context and therefore assessing the way how it intersects with other arrangements of social inequality to sustain gender inequality was the interest of the researcher. Therefore, issues like the practices of bride price payment, socio-cultural factors that underpin the practice bride price payment and the perceptions of women towards the practice were understood by using intersectionality theory.

Although the impact of bride price is said to extend from the lives of young people to their families, and even to the community. However, unlike the rest of the community, the impact is far greater on women's lives, because they are not payers. This happens not only because of the bride price been paid, but also because of the other things that come with the payment of the bride price. For example, the expected role of the woman in connection with the payment of; the bride price; the power or dominance that a man gains in his wife's property and children, both inside and outside the home, as well as other institutional and non-institutional traditions that follow; social: religious; and economic interactions exacerbate the problem.

4.5.2 4 Bride price payment and Polygamous Marriage.

The term "polygamy" is defined as having more than one spouse at a time. Polygamy persists in many countries around the world, most commonly taking the form of polygyny, or marriages in which a man has more than one wife (United Nations,2009). This study revealed that, among the Me'en community, men marry more than two or three wives as long as they can afford the bride price payment, and they perceive it as a sign of being wealthy.

The study revealed that in the Me'en tradition, it is normal for men of Me'en people to marry up to six wives as long as they pay the bride price. It is stated that a man can marry two, three, or more wives as long as he can pay a bride price payment. Consequently, among the Me'en people, polygamous marriage is a common form of marriage as long as the men are capable of paying the bride price to the girls' families.

Almost half of the informants of this study who belonged to Me'en, even those who are well educated, are polygynous, having an average of two and more wives. The women allow this knowingly and unknowingly because they are overworked and have a lot of labor to do both inside and outside the house. Because of this, they think that the second wife will help them with these workloads. The second marriage is conducted based on with or without the consent of the first wife and the husband paid a bride price from the first wife's property as well. The co-wives will share the first wife's property.

As the participant point of view, the main reason why men of Me'en people are able to marry more than two wives is that men see polygamy as a sign of wealth, and they are more likely to perceive it as a means to increase their descent, race, or family. On the other hand, they stated that all the workload is on the women in the household. Because of this, they believed that the coming co-wife would help with this workload. The following interview result clarifies this subject more as follows:

“In our Me'en community, men marry more than two wives as long as they can afford the bride price payment. This is why the men took it as a sign of being wealthy and as a means of increasing their clans or ethnicity. On the other hand, there is a big party in our culture when women are under a lot of work at home, especially when a person dies, and at that time, all the workload is on the woman, and the woman believes that the coming wife will help with this workload. (Resulted from Key Informant Interview with head of the Me'nit Shasha woreda's culture and tourism office conducted at Jemu, on July/2021)

The reason the Me'en women allowed such union came from two things, knowingly or unknowingly. Agreement and censuses derived from two things. The first comes from the recognition of rights and obligations, while the second stems from a lack of recognition of rights. In light of this, if the women of Me'en had known about their rights and obligations, they would not have allowed it. Therefore, unless women are aware that domestic work is not theirs alone

and their rights are not recognized, it is difficult to say that polygamous marriages in Me'en are conducted based on the will of the first wife.

As the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women reported, polygamy is one of the types of marriage practices which are discriminatory toward women. Where polygamy exists, violence against women by their husbands, as well as violence between co-wives, is common in polygamous households.

Marriage is the foundation of a family and, more broadly, of human society at large. Marriage, on the other hand, has a different meaning in different cultures. In many societies around the world, including Ethiopia, polygamy is a widely used form of establishing marriages and families. Despite cultural relativist arguments and religious and cultural explanations for polygamy marriage, the introduction of modern international and regional human rights laws in general, and women's rights in particular, brought forward strong condemnation of polygamy as a violation of women's marital rights.

In its general recommendation number 21 on equality in marriage and family life, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women stated: *"Polygamous marriage contravenes a woman's right to equality with men, and can have such serious emotional and financial consequences for her and her dependents that such marriages ought to be discouraged and prohibited."* (CEDAW General Recommendation No. 21: 1994). This goes with the data resulted in the study area. Furthermore, in reference to article 3 of the ICCPR, the Human Rights Committee has declared polygamy to be a violation of women's dignity and *"an inadmissible discrimination against women."* CEDAW, Gen. Rec. 21 para 14 also states that a polygamous marriage has a severe financial impact on women and their children within marriage.

Some studies have shown that, in recent years, polygamy has become more normalized in different regions of the world, especially in Pakistan's marital culture. It is said that the damage of polygamous marriages is more severe than the positive impacts. For instance, (Rafia, 2014) showed that not only did polygamy negatively affect the wives, it also had extremely harmful effects on children who were the product of such unions. As Rafia (2014) stated the children were neglected by their father when he had obtained a new wife. As the number of wives and

consequently the number of children grew, there were fewer resources and lesser attention or affection to go around.

Similarly, in Ethiopian context, some research has been done in this regard in different regions. To justify this, A study conducted by Kedir and Sofanit (2016) revealed that gender inequalities exist in polygamous marriage and that the practice has caused different pain towards women like psychological, economical and health problems in Jijiga, particularly at the Dir clan of Somali., Too Adam (2018) revealed that among the Bench people, polygamous marriages were common as long as the men were capable of paying the bride price to their families and revealed that it caused violations of property right for the first wife the second co-wife

4.5.2.5 Bride price payment and widow inheritance marriage (Qenesen)

This study shown that in the Me'en tradition; widow inheritance marriage (qenesen) is the most commonly conducted marriage as a result of bride price payment. As the data available on the study area shows, according to the Me'en tradition, once the bride price is paid and the woman marries, if the husband dies, the younger brother of the deceased inherits her. If there is no younger brother or next third brother, the wife of the deceased person would be inherited by the deceased uncle or niece, and she can't go outside the male family.

Furthermore, *Tippett Allan (1970)* was written about the widow inheritance marriage of Me'en, as such; if the eldest brother died, the second brother would take his wife. If the second brother died, the third brother took his wife, the first being like a father to him. If the deceased was the youngest brother and there was no younger brother to take the wife, the dead man's sister's son would be responsible. This confirmed the presence of a widow's successive inheritance by her deceased husband's brothers in the study area.

The other influence of bride price payment in Me'en women's marital life is that it results in widow inheritance marriages widely among the Me'en people. The existing data shows that due to the payment of *kela* (bride price), such widow inheritance forms of marriage are still widely practiced in the Me'en community in the study area, called *Qenesen*. Widow Inheritance is a cultural practice in which a widow is expected to marry a kinsman, brother-in-law, or close male relative of her late husband. One key informant informed as follow;

According to our Me'en culture, once a woman is married and the bride price is paid, if the husband dies, if the deceased had a younger brother or a close relative, she would be inherited as the wife of the deceased's younger brother or a close relative. Because they perceived that, once the deceased husband is given bride price and that bride price is the property of our brother, they think that therefore no one else can enter the property, including his wife.

It is still possible to understand here how women are considered as a commodity and the burden of bride price does not fall on them for the rest of their lives even if their husbands die. The husband has the right to command his wife even if he dies. Because as long as the bride price is paid, she has no right to decide for herself what she wants to do with her life. This is a clear indication of how much women have been deprived of their freedom and human rights as a result of the due this customary practice.

Some researchers state that the prevalence of widow inheritance marriages in Ethiopia was stated by some researchers. For instance Tilahun and Meron (2019), stated that widow inheritance marriage practice among Boro-Shinasha was in Benishangul Gumuz regional state known as 'Nataa'. These researchers conducted their study entitled, *Challenges and Violations of Women's Rights in Widow Inheritance Marriage*, and revealed that the social, economic, and psychological challenges faced by widows in the Boro-Shinasha socio-cultural practice of 'Naata' marriage (widow inheritance) to their brother-in-laws were complex and multifaceted. Again, maladministration and resistance from the elder council for this practice. These challenges were a result of the violations of women's rights, particularly the widows' rights.

Also, Adam (2018) detailed that in the same way, it is widely practiced by the Bench community's culture and widow inheritance marriage is called *Barz*, and it is the other challenge to the marital rights of women among Bench people due to the payment of bride price (Tilosh).

The major reason for the Me'en people's tradition for the arrangement of this form of marriage was that they think that the bride price paid is their deceased brother's property, and therefore no one else can enter the property, including his wife. On the other hand, another main reason for implementing this type of marriage in Me'en people was to keep the deceased man's children within the family and to keep the children from being neglected by the step-father to whom the widow would marry if she went elsewhere. As the community elder of Me'en informed us, this

type of marriage is conducted in front of the elders and families of both the deceased husband and widow. Also, the elders explored that;

The procedure was carried out through a ritual in which the new husband and wife of the deceased person were washed in the blood of the sacrificed animal, typically a goat, to symbolize their martial togetherness. Following the ritual ceremony, the widow would become the wife of the deceased person's brother. The deceased's children would also be considered their uncle's offspring. The inheritor takes on the responsibilities the resource, administer and manage the widow's resources and care for the children of the deceased man in front of the elders.

Here again, the woman's (widowed) property rights, access, and management rights are back. Though, recognizing inheritors' responsibility to keep the children from being neglected by the step-father to whom the widow would marry protecting and in terms of preventing resources in front of elders is one of the more appreciable practices for genuine administrations and managements of widows' resources from waste and mismanagement by family in-law, other relatives, and outsiders. However, as key informants stated, property ownership and resource inheritance are discriminatory for widowed in 'Qenesen' marriage practice in the Me'en community. For somehow, the practice regarding the protection of a woman's (widowed) right to access property rights is indebted to the Me'en community, however it is followed with preconditions. For example, the key informants responded that:

Widows who have followed the practices and have sons who have reached the age of defense are in a better position to share the inheritance of their late husbands' property. Mostly, widows will have the right and access to inherit property if they have children and are willing to go through the rites. However, widows, particularly those who did not have children during their late husbands' lives, are denied such basic rights to access and own property.

In the Me'en culture, a widow cannot share property if she is unable to bear children during her stay with her deceased husband. As a result, widows' right to equal property inheritance is contingent on the desire of the late husband's or close male relative's family. *Those widows who*

do not have children, as well as those who have rejected burial rites and inheritance marriages, are evicted and forced to return to their family without sharing the resources.

This practice contradicts with the different international, regional and national legal instruments.

For instance, Article 35 of the South Nation Nationalities Constitution under its Sub-Article 8;

Says women have the right to own, manage, control, use and transfer property. In particular, they have equal rights to use, transfer, and control land. It also says that, especially regarding inheritance and access, they have the right to be treated equally. (The Revised Constitution ,2001 of SNNR35/8) .

4.5.2.6 Bride price payment and Fertility preferences of women

Key informant interview was held with a health expert from Me'nit Shahsa woreda, and a focused group discussion was also conducted with community elders in the study area to understand whether the influence of bride price was associated with women's fertility right or not. Accordingly, based on the information gathered from those key informants from health experts and FGD discussants in the study area, besides the other influences of marriage, it causes women to have more children. As stated by the focused group discussant in this regard,

"Me'en people perceived that marriage would be blessed with the birth of a child. Therefore, in the Me'en tradition, as long as the woman is once married and the bride price is paid for her family, the woman should be able to have many children."

Similarly, according to the data gained from the key informant interviewee at Jemu Kebele,

"Women's reproductive health is not taken into account in Me'en traditions, such as choosing on their own reproductive rights and the freedom to give birth and/or use contraception." All of this is decided by men as long as the bride fee is paid, and our women have no say in how many children they will have or whether or not to use contraceptive methods for birth control'' (On June, 2021, a key informant interview with an old man was performed at Jemu Kebele)

Because of the typical practice of bride price, which gives males unilateral influence over their wives' reproductive difficulties, this interview result emphasizes how much Me'en women confront a variety of challenges. This practice is in violation of various international, regional,

and national legal instruments that recognize both men and women's reproductive rights within marriage. The following is how CEDAW In its Article (16/e) defined men and women's equality in marriage and family relationships in general, and reproductive rights in particular:

"The same rights to choose the number and spacing of their children freely and responsibly, as well as to have access to the information, education, and resources necessary to exercise these rights. As a result, states must ensure that both men and women have access to a comprehensive range of contraceptive options and reproductive health services, as well as that people who have information on family planning and sexual and reproductive health."

However, the bride price payment practice in the study area is contradicted with this declaration. According to the local culture, having many children and polygamy is also considered a manifestation of wealth. This is why women need to have more children. Therefore, it is possible to understand how this bride price violates the right to health and reproductive rights of women.

This study's finding is inconsistent with the research findings conducted in Senegal about the relationship between bride price payments and fertility decisions, which is entitled, "*Bride Price and Fertility Decisions: Evidence from Rural Senegal*." It revealed that higher bride price payments reduce the fertility pressure for women, with the results being robust to confounding socio-economic and contextual factors. The fertility-reducing impact is greater for women who are economically dependent on their husbands (Linguère and Natascha, 2017).

The right to health and health care is an essential component of our human rights. Women's reproductive rights take precedence over all other health rights of married women. Within marriage, reproductive rights are critical to the lives and health of women and children. In various parts of the world, as well as in our country Ethiopia, special attention is paid to the rights and status of women's health by various governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The right to health and health care is an essential component of our human rights. Women's reproductive rights take precedence over all other health rights of married women. Within marriage, reproductive rights are critical to the lives and health of women and children. In various parts of the world, as well as in our own country, Ethiopia, special attention is paid to the

rights and status of women's health by various governmental and non-governmental organizations. Similarly, Menit Shasha woreda is working harder than any other government office to ensure the health of women, but as a result of the bride price, Menen women are forced to give birth to more children and have not been able to make complete progress due to the negative impact of this practice, as the health expert said. In addition to the benefits and negative influences listed earlier, bride price payment hinders women's fertility rights and their reproductive rights within marriage in Me'en people. As per the information available from the study area, men typically show a greater desire for having more children than women, and this desire for more children violates women's reproductive rights. This is similar to the situations of bench women stated by (Adam, 2018). He revealed that the practice of bride price impedes the reproductive rights of women within marriage among Bench people, where men have steadily had a greater desire to have more children than women, a desire for more children which violates the reproductive rights of women in the Bench community. As the culture of the Me'en community and the culture of the Bench community are closely related in many ways, having more children is expected of a woman, and men also have a great desire to have more children. According to Me'en, if a woman is unable to give birth by chance or is ill, her husband either evicts her from her house and returns the bride price or remarries another woman.

4.6 Women's and Men's View of Bride Price Payment and Its Impact on Women's Marital Life.

This sub section of this chapter generally contains the views of married women and men towards the bride price, how they understand and see the benefits and harms of the bride price payment, and the meanings that they give to the bride price payment.

4.6.1 View of Women on Bride Price Payment and Its impact

To do this, in this study, married women participants were asked to describe how they view the bride price, how they understand it, and the meaning and how they see the advantages and disadvantages of the bride's price for them. Also, they were asked to describe the benefits of the bride price payment for the girl, the boy, the family, and the whole community, and their view towards the continuation of the bride price. According to the data collected from the participants, women's viewpoints ranged from those who knew nothing or didn't know what the bride price

was to those who understood everything and were able to explain the matter in the best way possible.

The data gained from some of the married women of Era-me'nit revealed that they don't know why the community practices this payment. For instance, data results from those few married women at this kebele show that the only thing that they know is that it is deep-rooted and must be practiced in the culture of their community. One FGD discussant, for example, responded in this manner;

'Of course, the bride price was paid for my family when I got married. But I don't know why it was paid and its' benefit. The only thing that I know is that it is a must in our community's culture' (A married woman from FGD, at Era me 'nit, Jun/2021).

According to the data acquired from a few married women in Era-menit and Jemu, they saw the payment of the bride price as a way of showing their husband's esteem and affection for them and their family. For example, expressed their view as below:

I feel inferior, I lose my prestige, and I am embarrassed in front of my friends if the payment is not made. Not only that, but how am I meant to know whether he loves me and respects my family if he can't afford to give the Tilosh (bride price) to my parents? (In-depth conversation with married women at Jemu, and Era -Me'nit June 30/2021and/2021).

In the meantime, some of the married women at Era Me'nit and Jemu similarly were reported that little differently. They informed that it does not benefit the women themselves, but it does benefit their younger brothers and their families. For example, they state that the bride price which paid off for their families when they got married will benefited their younger brother when he gets married. To confirm this, one in-depth interviewee mentioned that; *if the bride had a younger brother, the bride price payment that had already been paid would be used as a bridegroom's gift to his fiancée's (wife-to-be) families when he married.*

As the data gathered from key informants, a person who pays a lot of bride price in the Me'en community is considered as a rich; In order to receive the bride price, Me'en women are forced go with a man who is older than them. To validate this on key informant stated as follow;

In our society, a person who pays a lot of bride price is considered as a rich man; for the sake of bride price, Me'en's women forced to marry someone older than them.

On the other extreme, according to some woman's view, society perceives the girl as an economic source of wealth because of the bride price payment. The data gathered from FGD discussants confirmed the above idea as below;

Because of the bride price payment, society views the girl as an economic source of income. For example, the main reason for our community's habit of giving this gift during marriage is that it is seen as a way of compensating for the money spent by the girl's family to raise their daughter. But after the bride has been paid and the women are married, the man can do whatever he wants with the woman as long as he pays the bride price. As a result, bride price payment subjects us to labor exploitation, physical abuse, and causes polygamous marriages in this area.

According to the women's perspectives, in the community, they are happier with the birth of a girl than with a boy. Because when a woman marries, she brings the bride price to her family. But the man cannot do this because he is a payer. That is why society views girls as an economic source of income. Basically, the family has a duty to raise the child until it is born. But the Me'en community does not think so. As most data shows, the community receives the bride price to compensate for the cost of raising the daughter. That being said, why don't they accept the cost of raising their son? This is a clear indication that the system and the practice have a significant negative impact on equality.

Generally, according to the women's point of view, divorce was denied because of the bride price in their community; women were forced to have as many children as the men wanted; it gave an opportunity for men to marry many wives as long as they paid; women dropped out of school and did not get an education. As a result, it is understood that the bride price payment is of no use to the women, and that it makes their marriage lives more difficult. To justify this the data gathered from One FGD discussant expressed as follow;

Because of the bride price payment, there is no divorce in our society; women are forced to have many children at a time as the man wants; this customary practice gives men an opportunity to marry more than one wife as long as they pay; and women do not go to

school because society prefers to accept the bride price rather than educate a girl. For instance, if we go to school and see the number of female students of Me'en community, it is very small. As a result, women drop out of school.

Regarding the benefit of bride price payment for the girl, the boy, the family and the whole community, all married women informants inform that the bride price has no positive impact on the girl and the boy, but it benefits only the bride's family and only those men who are involved in the decision making towards the bride price payment. As a result, the continuation of the bride price was not supported by the majority of women participants.

4.6.2 View of Men on Bride Price Payment and Its impact

Just as the female participants were asked, the males were also asked a variety of questions in order to understand how they looked at the bride price payment and its impact. Also, they were requested to inform their view towards the continuations of the bride price. The men's view is still divided into two domains. For example, there are those who think that the bride price is good; on the other hand, there are men who explain the impact and state that the bride price is not good for women like what the women said.

Few married men at both Era-menit and Jemu responded that they supported this customary practice. They revealed that they perceived the bride price as a gift to their wife's (bride's) family to say thank you! for the care they give to their daughter, as a means of compensation for her family for the cost that they incur when they rear her all her life. For example, two in-depth interviewees from both sites similarly responded that:

For instance, when I got married, I paid ten (10) cattle, 2000 birr and one (1) firearm to my wife's family. This shows that a girl is precious in our society. Her family spent a lot of money on her, grew her up, and took care of her when she was sick, and they dressed her. So, I believe it is deserved for them. (Two in-depth interview participants from both sites, Jun /2021).

While a few of the others saw it as a way to gain their wife's trust in order to live together for a long time. They justify the practice as a means to confirm and validate trust, as well as a sense of full ownership over their wives and pride. They state that if the husband pays the bride price for

the bride's family, she stays within the marriage for a long time, unless she leaves the marriage at any time. As an illustration, some of the FGD discussants provided their view as below:

If I pay the bride fee to her family, she will not go anywhere except me. My confidence and trust in her grow. But if I don't pay, she can leave me at any time. If the bride price payment is paid for her family, she stays within the marriage for a long time, unless she leaves the marriage at any time.

Most men say that paying the bride price will keep their wives from going anywhere, and it will enable them to have more children and have more offspring. They expressed their view that *'paying bride price allows me to have more children'*. Participants explained that the bride price benefits men in many ways. Participants expressed their views on the benefits of the bride fee and its benefits as; *in our culture, the bride price is very important to us. Paying it allows us to have more children. Traditionally, a man could have more than one wife if he could afford to pay the bride price.* On the other hand, other participants expressed their views on the benefits of the bride price and its benefits as;

Paying the bride price is a way of showing wealth and a way of inheriting our family's economic resource. In our culture, for example, if a boy wants to get married and can't afford the bride fee, his father, older brother, or uncle will pay. As a result of this, there will be a division of wealth within the family.

Therefore, from the point of view of the participants, bride price is a cultural practice that promotes equitable distribution of wealth and mutual economic support between their families. It also states that having this bride price payment will help young people to have a strong work ethic and not waste their time in a bad way. For example, as few FGD discussants stated below:

In our culture, for example, when a boy wants to get married, he knows that he has to pay the bride price and he raises cattle and plows the fields. So, if there was no bride price payment, the young people would not have a strong work ethic and would go to the city and spend their time addicted to bad things.

At the other extreme, few participants; also said that paying bride price is useless and will cause economic hardship to the couple. They say, *'the bride price is of no use to us as a couple,*

because when we give a bride price, we give all our wealth to the bride's family. Accordingly, economically, we start our own life from scratch.

Unlike the married women participants' view, the bride price payment practice and its continuation are supported and advocated by half of the married men and community elders, since the community elders believe that it creates healthy, long-lasting relationships and mutual assistance between the two families and blesses the marriage.

While married men perceive the bride price as allowing them to have trust in their wives, it also allows them to have more children and wives, and so on. But they strongly discouraged the amount of the bride's price payment. When men were asked why they want the bride price payment practice to continue, they said that to compensate for the cost that they spent when they got married; they had to pay for their wife's family. Accordingly, the data resulted from the majority of married men of both Jemu and Era. me'nit showed that the receiving bride price payment (kela) when they give their daughter to a husband is perceived as a means of compensation for the time spent on marrying their wife. Following this, most men mentioned that the main reason they receive a bride price payment is to compensate for the cost that they spent on marrying their wives. To validate this, one male participant said that,

For example, I have two daughters. When my daughters grow up and get married, I will receive a bride price. Because when I married their mother, I paid off about nine (9) cattle, one firearm and 3000 Birr for her parents. (Young married man from in-depth interview at Jemu on July/2021)

Based on data from the participants, in general, it is understood that men, unlike women, have a positive view of bride price and want it to continue.

4.7 Case Stories

Young Married Woman at Era-Me'nit by Arranged Marriage

Case 1. "Unbeknownst to me, at first he proposed marriage by sending elders (damas) to my family. I was a grade six student at that time. Then my family ended the marriage negotiations with the elders without informing me. In the end, I refused, even though my parents were willing, because I wanted to continue my education. A month after the negotiation was finished, and then the elders came with the bride price that my family had requested. At the time, I did not want to, but my parents forced me to marry someone I did not know because they had accepted the bride price before. My husband paid 17,000 birr, 12 heads of cattle, and one fire arm to my family. Even though I am pleased with the payment because it is traditional in our society, I feel awful about dropping out of school. This is because in our culture, if the bride price is paid and a woman gets married, there will be no education."

Young Married Woman: Era-Me'nit

This case shows how much bride price is a prerequisite for legalizing a marriage and how the Me'en community is forcing their daughters to marry someone they do not know just because they have accepted their bride price without respecting their wishes, and forcing them to drop out of school just because they have received their bride price without respect. It is also clear that women cannot participate in the bride price payment decision-making process and will not be able to make decisions on their own.

Married Man at Jemu

Case 2. "My wife and I were first married, and I fell in love with the girl. At the time, I was a college student in Jimma. It was 1999 E.C. Firstly, my family proposed marriage by sending elders (damas) to her family. Then my wife's family requested the necessary bride fee and the elders agreed on it. At the time, even though I was a college student, I had a small salary because I had previously worked for a contracted DA farm. I was preparing for the bride price payment because I loved the girl and wanted to marry her. Two months later, the negotiation was finished, and the elders took the requested bride price to her family and paid for it. At that time, even though I had prepared myself partly, I could not afford to pay the bride fee totally. So, my father and older brother helped me, and I was able to get married to her by paying about 20,000 birr, 9 heads of cattle, and one fire arm. I am happy with the marriage because it is our culture and I have been able to have many children. But economically, it hurts us men too; because I paid for all that I had saved for my wife's family. As a result, I started my own life from scratch. I have now transferred my residence because of a job transition in a government office, and I have come to live in Jemu. Due to this, my first wife is in the countryside, taking care of my farms and raising my children. Because life is difficult here, I am now marrying my second wife. My first wife also heard this and she knew it. But she cannot complain because marrying three or four wives is common in our culture."

Married Man: Jemu

From this story it can be understood that, the items for bride price payment among Me'en community is the same and how the payment process creates economic co-operation between the male families. And also, it is clear that the bride price allows men to have more children, to have more wives, and to control their marital affairs superiorly. On the other hand, this means that women have no equal right to decide on their marital life as long as the bride price is paid.

4.8 Discussion

This sub part of the conducted research also consisted of the discussion of major findings in line with previously conducted research findings reviewed in the literature. Throughout, the discussion issues regarding the prevalence of the bride price payment practice, the reasons underpinning it, and existing contradictions between the impacts of these customary practices on local realities and empirical evidence are addressed.

Ethiopian society is predominantly patriarchal in nature which is a major feature of a traditional society. Patriarchal institutions and social relations are responsible for the inferior or secondary status of women. Patriarchal society gives absolute priority to men and, to some extent, limits women's agency and violates women's human rights thus, this is especially evident in marriage. It is a structure of a set of social relations with material base which enables men to dominate women. Arranged marriage is the most typical form of marriage in such societies. In addition, the bride price is prevalent in this sort of marriage. Bride wealth is commonly practiced in Ethiopian communities throughout the country, particularly in the northern regions such as Tigray and Amhara (Boyden et al., 2013). Similarly, this study revealed that the Me'en community is patriarchal, where men order, control, and dominate every aspect of marriage. As a result, while the Me'en community has a variety of marriage forms, the arranged marriage is the most common, and it is conducted with bride price payment transfers from the groom or groom's family to the bride's parents.

As Sambe et al. (2013) said, the practice of bride price has different names in different countries and regions of Africa and revealed that in the Zulus it is known as *Lobola*, while the Tiv of central Nigeria call it *kem*. Likewise, the bride price payment among the Me'en people was known as *Kela* in the Me'en language, or informally called *Tilosh*. According to Linguère & Natascha (2017), in many sub-Saharan African countries, particularly in Senegal, the bride price payment is a key element of the marriage contract in Senegal. Consistently, the bride price payment (*Kela*) among Me'en has deep historical roots and is a highly appreciated cultural practice used to validate their customary marriages. It is a key element and prerequisite of the marriage contract in all the Me'en community's marriage traditions. *Kela* (Bride price payment) among the Me'en community refers to common forms of wealth paid by the groom or groom's family to the bride's family (to the family of the woman he will be married to or is just about to

marry) at the time of marriage. Cattles (bees), firearms (Losha), and money are found to be the main and inevitable items needed to conduct any form of marriage among the Me'en peoples. It is similar to that of what (Oumo, 2004), defined as bride-price or bride wealth, is used to validate customary marriages. It consists of a contract where material items (often cattle or other animals) or money are paid by the groom to the bride's family in exchange for the bride.

The finding of this study shows that the practice of bride price payment is broadly prevalent among all communities' members of Me'en in Me'nit Shasha woreda, particularly at Jemu and Era Me'nit. The "*Shobi to Oka*" (arranged marriage), "*Quren*" (marriage by abduction), "*Qenesen*" (widow inheritance marriage), "*Joren*" (marriage by consent between the two spouses), and polygamous marriage are the most common forms of marriage among Me'en peoples. Though the Me'en community has these different forms of marriage, the bride price payment exists in all marriage types and in the culture of the Me'en community. The bride price is the most important prerequisite issue in establishing any acceptable form of marriage. All married women and men, as well as the spiritual and community leaders who belong to Me'en at both Jemu and Era-me'nit, provided their own reasons for the socio-cultural motives for the practiced bride price as they requested. Based on the data gained from these participants, bride price (*kela*) is frequently explained by numerous socio-cultural grounds among the Me'en people.

Though the bride price is said to have its own cultural, social, economic, and religious implications, the economic motives play the lion's share. Even if the issue is explained as a socio-cultural norm, this study found that the rationale for the *Kela* payment during marriage among Me'e people has a greater economic motive. Economically, data gathered from both sex participants in this regard indicated that the economic motive was identified as the primary reason for the existence of the bride price in the study area. As a result, all participants agreed that the Me'en community saw the bride price as a way of compensating the bride's family for the money they spent raising their daughter throughout her life. This finding is similar to the findings of Adam (2018) in the conducted among the bench community. He revealed that the rationale of Tilosh during marriage among Bench people has more of an economic motive even if the issue is justified as a socio-cultural practice.

Concerning the marriage experiences of the participants all informants' first marriage was involved bride price payment. All married male participants in this study stated that they got married by paying bride price payment. In this study, participants were asked to identify the main actors in the bride price payment process, as well as who will or will not be directly involved in the decision-making process. Accordingly, it is said that the bride's family, the elders, and the bridegroom's family, as well as the groom himself, are directly involved in the bride's price payment process and oversee the negotiations. However, mothers and girls are not permitted to participate or even be present in the decision-making process. Consequently, the inability of women to participate in the bride price payment process and decision-making is another indication of the negative impact of the practice towards gender equality.

The role of women in the expansion and continuation of the bride price payment was explored. According to the data collected from the informants, women knowingly or unknowingly played a significant role in promoting and expanding the practice of bride price payment in the study area. Thus, it is revealed that women of Me'en people are indirectly playing their own part in promoting and expanding the practice of bride price payment in the study area. To validate this, it is stated that the women of Me'en believe that when a man is asked to marry, the bride price must be paid to their family first and that if it is not paid, they will not accept the marriage. There are two possible reasons for Me'en women to think in this way: the first may be because they do not know or are uneducated, and the second may be due to fear of family and social pressures if they marry without paying the bride price. However, there is no research that can support or confirm that women are playing a role in the bride price payment process. Therefore, more research is needed in the future to show the role of women in the dowry process. There is a wide range of perceptions toward marriage between married men and women of Me'en people. According to the majority of women's views, society perceives the girl as an economic source of wealth because of the bride price payment. Married women were associated with negative outcomes such as commodification and dehumanization of women, denial of divorce, physical violence, forcing young girls to marry older men as long as they could afford it, school dropouts, and denial of their property rights. This finding is consistent with Eryenyu (2014), who stated that the objections stem from the view that the transactional nature of the practice results in the commodification of women and has adverse consequences. For example, husbands may feel they can mistreat their wives because they have paid for them, leaving women in marriages prone to

physical violence and conflict. According to the women's perspectives, in the Me'en community, they are happier with the birth of a girl than with a boy. Because when a woman marries, she brings the bride price to her family. But the man cannot do this because he is a payer. *That is why society views girls as an economic source of income.* Basically, the family has a duty to raise the child until it is born. But the Me'en community does not think so. As most data shows, the community receives the bride price to compensate for the cost of raising the daughter. That being said, why don't they accept the cost of raising their son? This is a clear indication that the system and the practice have a significant negative impact on equality.

However, the married men perceived the bride price payment as a good opportunity and appreciable. They see the practice as a means to confirm and validate trust, as well as a sense of full ownership over their wives and pride. They justify it as a cultural practice that promotes equitable distribution of wealth and mutual economic support between their families. It allows them to have more children and wives. Based on data from the participants, in general, it is revealed that men, unlike women, have a positive view of the bride price and want it to continue since they are the spenders and perpetuators. As Frank (2011) revealed that respondents in Ruanda had negative attitudes associated with bride price such as leading to marriage instability, affecting spouse interaction and they also link the practice to domestic violence. Similarly, due to the payment of the bride price, according to Me'en culture, women's property rights are based on preconditions. For instance, if a woman does not leave her house under any circumstances, if she is able to have more children, she has an equal right to her property. But for example, if she leaves her home and if she is unable to have more children, she will lose her property right. Women of Me'en work both outdoors and indoors and have been subjected to labor exploitation, but they are unable to own and control economic resources on an equal footing with their husbands. This completely contradicted with the of the 1995 FDRE Constitution of Ethiopia under its provision number two (2), which stated that “*women have equal rights with men in marriage as prescribed by this Constitution*”, and also with what is stated on its provision number seven (7), which say “*women have the right to acquire, administer, control, use and transfer property. In particular, they have equal rights with men with respect to use, transfer, administration and control of land*” (Article 35 /2 and 35 /7, Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia ,1995)

This is in line with social feminism theory, which claims that gender inequality is the foundation of the patriarchal system because it is an unavoidable consequence of capitalism. The gender-based division of work is purposefully designed in the capitalist economy to favor males and penalize women. The means of production are owned by men, and their work has a monetary value. Women, on the other hand, are limited to domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, child care, and so on, which do not normally yield immediate monetary benefits. Not only is this, but also the bride price caused polygamous marriages, widow inheritance marriages, denial of women's right to divorce, forcing women to have more children or hide their fertility rights, access to education, depriving of freedom, and gender-based violence ranging from physical violence to murder. Generally, the finding of this study revealed that bride price is caused for violations of women's fundamental right. So, it is clear that bride price payment cementing gender equality. The current study's findings are also consistent with those of (Adam, 2018), who revealed that the customary practice of Tilosh violates women's marital rights, particularly the right to education, access to reproductive health rights, the right to property, access to legal divorce, and decision-making role within the household. The study also finds the customary practice of Tilosh is the cause of polygamous marriage, widow inheritance, and women's labor exploitation within marriage.

Generally, bride price in among Me'en community found greatly associated with physical violence, murder, robbery, theft, abduction and other IPV both before and after the payment. Due to this customary practice, women of Me'en are subjected to threats, beatings, and evictions from their home as a result of bride price payment. Also, this study revealed that the bride price has appeared as a source of becoming a source of different security problems and crimes in the area, even before and after the bride price was paid, beyond the lives of the women in the community. Though it is stated that the bride price has numerous negative influences on the wider society, however, unlike the rest of the community members, it is easy to understand how much more affected women are by this problem than the others. This is briefly in line with intersectionality theory's assumptions. This study was interested in exploring how bride price intersects with other structures of social inequality to preserve gender disparity because bride price changes from social context to social context. Therefore, Intersectionality theory was helpful to understand the impacts of bride price payment, socio-cultural elements that underpin the practice, and women's perspectives towards the practices and how the practice negatively influenced women's agency

to claim their right through creating male dominance over their wives within the marriage via wrapping on the patriarchal system.

Abundant efforts have been done to narrowing the gender inequality and to ensure women's agency to claim their rights. Ethiopia has pledged to promote gender equality and uphold the convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform of Action, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2012). Furthermore, Ethiopia has implemented policy reforms aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. A number of policies and programs have been implemented. For instance, promoting gender equality and empower women was the third goals Ethiopian millennium development goals ETHIOPIA MDGs REPORT (2012). Women's policy formulation, revision of family and criminal legislation, and development of the National Action Plan (NAP) on gender equality are among them. The Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth Affairs (MoWCYA) and similar bureaus at the federal, regional, and sub-regional levels are additional evidences to the government's commitment to resolving gender inequities and supporting women's empowerment. Though gender equality has increasingly become an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all national development programmes in our country. In some places, these efforts are not as effective as they should be due to a number of complex challenges linked to historic power imbalances and deep-rooted traditional beliefs, attitudes and cultural values.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Marriage plays a vital role in establishing a family. It maintains mutual support between the couples and also ensures the continuity of the generation. In most societies, marriage implies transfers between the groom's and bride's families. These transfers are usually in the form of payments, and depending on the culture of the society, they have varying names, implementations, and socio-cultural explanations. The main purpose of this study was to explore the practice of the bride price payment and perceptions among married women and men regarding its impacts on gender equality focused on marital stability, violence and freedom as a scope; among the Me'en community. Though marriage is a universal institution found in all human cultures, however, laws and customs regarding marriage vary depending on the community. Accordingly, marriage in the Me'en tradition, called "*Gamen*", has its own implementation system, and it is highly valued and respected.

Based on the findings of this study, marriage among Me'en people is endogamous, which means marriage within the same clan is permissible. Marriage among Me'en refers not only to the union of the two couples to be married but also to their families and kinship groups in blood as well as their clans. Marriage can be conducted by arranged marriage (Shobi to 'oka'), marriage by abduction ("*Quren*"), marriage by the consent between the two spouses (*Joren*), widow inheritance marriage (Qenesen), or polygamous marriage (a man with multiple wives) in the Me'en community. Whatever the forms of marriage in the Me'en tradition, bride price payment plays a principal role in the marriage contractual agreement. Though the Me'en people have these several forms of marriage, the bride price is found to be a key element and prerequisite of the marriage contract over all the traditions of Me'en.

The study revealed, among the Me'en community, *Kela* (bride price payment) refers to common forms of wealth paid by the groom or groom's family to the bride's family (to the family of the woman he will be married to or is just about to marry) at the time of marriage. The bride price payment (*Kela*) was found to be a deeply rooted and highly appreciated culture among the Me'en communities, as well as various socio-cultural justifications are attached to it by the community.

All the informants mentioned that the common items that were paid for in their own first marriage were primarily livestock (bees), firearms (*Losha*), and money. Though the cats (*bees*), firearms (*Losha*), and money (*Korsha*) are found to be the main and inevitable items for conducting marriages among the Me'en peoples, at the moment the payment of firearms (*losha*) has changed to cash.

Informants at both Jemu and Era-me'nit, were attempted to respond with their own explanation of the socio-cultural reasons underpinning bride price payment practices in the study area. In this regard, research participants were repeated in similar ways across all the relevant interviews and fell clearly into three categories, as follows: social, economic, and religious justifications.

Socially bride price payments and the value attached to it by the Me'en community were symbolic of what the girl is worth and as a gift to say thank you! for the bride's family. Moreover, the community perceived the bride price payment creates healthy long-lasting relationships and mutual assistance between the two families. According to the data in this regard, the economic motive was identified as the primary reason for the existence of the bride price in the study area. This study revealed that the Me'en community perceived bride price payment as a means of compensation to the bride's family for the cost that they spent when rearing their daughter. Religiously, in the Me'en tradition, marriage without bride price payment was perceived as unblessed and paying the bride price payment and slaughtering one heifer/cow to the aunt of the bride and giving one heifer to the traditional spiritual leaders out of the payment is believed to give a healthy, peaceful life, long age and give a child to the couples.

This study revealed that, during bride price negotiations, mothers and girls are not permitted to participate in the payment and decision-making process, whereas the bride's family, the elders, and the bridegroom's family are the principal actors who are directly involved in the payment process. Based on the participants' point of view, the findings of the study revealed that although the bride price payment has its own advantages and disadvantages, the disadvantages are far greater. The majority of married male participants associated the practice with positive impacts, while the married women associated it with various drawbacks in their marital life. As a result of bride price payment, women of Me'en face abundant violations of fundamental rights. Among the problems or violations that women face as a result of bride price payment are: the community sees the girls as a source of income, women of Me'en are subjected to threats, beatings, and

evictions from their homes or physical violence, violation of full right to property, denial of access to legal divorce, labor exploitation, polygamous marriage, widow inheritance, and hindering women's fertility preference as far as the bride price is paid and etc are some of the major ones. Generally, the bride price in the Me'en community is found the major obstacle for women's ability to claim their rights with in marriage. Due this practice, Me'en women face fundamental rights violations ranging from threats, beatings, evictions from their homes, to death.

There is a wide range of differences between men and women's views regarding bride price and its impact. Accordingly, the married women participants associated the bride price with many negative side effects, while the married men informants associated the practice with many positive side effects. Therefore, more research is needed in the future concerning the views of men and the impact of bride price payment on gender equality.

Generally, bride-price was considered by the majority of informants to cement gender inequality, giving women little power and possibly turning them into commodities to be passed from family to family. Thus, bride-price can be seen both as a symptom of male dominance and power in families and also as a cause. Consequently, the subservient position of the wife is made worse and greater inequality is frequently caused by the payment of bride-price.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the bride price payment has its own significant benefits as a community culture. This can be easily understood from the listed socio-cultural justifications raised by the participants. The payment of bride price (*Kela*) beyond its benefit, it negatively affects gender equality in the area, especially it makes Me'en women's marital life difficult. Hence, if the negative impacts of bride price payment on gender equality are found to be greater than its positive influences within the marriage, and if it makes one spouse the beneficiary and the other to be victim, the researcher recommend that it is necessary to work on it.

- ✓ As a result, the researcher cannot conclude that this culture must be entirely eradicated or extinct as long as the community has its own reasons for doing so.
- ✓ However, if the culture's application is proven to be more troublesome than useful, it is critical to demonstrate that many parties must intervene to solve the observed problem.

- ✓ So, based on the findings of the study concerning bride price and its adverse impact on women's lives, the following issues are recommended.
- ❖ Women's consciousness must be raised by the government and other stakeholders, including making them aware of their rights, ensuring equal participation, ensuring that they can make their own decisions, and generally empowering them to educate, as education is the solution to many problems.
- ❖ It is not enough to work on women's consciousness alone to solve this problem and ensure gender equality. Therefore, more needs to be done to develop men's consciousness and to adjust their view of the bride price and to understand the negative influence on their women's life.
- ❖ At the woreda level, governmental stakeholders such as the Me'nit Shasha Woredas' police, health office, the women's, children, and youth affairs office, and others should work jointly to reduce the negative influences of the bride price on women's lives.
- ❖ At the woreda level the governmental stake holder such as the Me'nit Shasha Woredas' police, Health office, the Women, children and youth affair office and others should work jointly to reduce the negative influences of bride price on women's life.
- ❖ Not only the governmental organizations but also other civil society groups such as NGOs who are working on women's issues should preserve the culture and work hard to reduce its negative impact on women. They should work on improving the socio-economic status of the women.

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APPENDIXES

I. Interview guidelines for informants at Era me'nit and Jemu at Me'nit Shasha Woreda.

This research question set is intended for an in-depth interview and focus group discussions in order to conduct research on "exploring the practice of bride price payment and perceptions among women and men regarding its impacts on gender equality among the Me'en community, West Omo Zone, SNNP Region." This is for the partial fulfillment of my MA degree in Sociology of Gender and Family Studies. So, to accomplish the study, your response and information is necessary. Therefore, genuine opinions and ideas are very important for the following questions. The data I will collect will be used only for academic purposes. Beside this, your information will be kept confidential.

Informants' background

Age.....

Sex.....

Religion.....

Education level

Occupation.....

Marital status.....Place of interview.....

Number of children (if any)

Place of residence.....

Date of interview.....

Time of interview

1. Interview Guide Questions for married Women and Men at Era-menit and Jemu in Me'nit Shasha Woreda, West Omo Zone.

A. Interview Guide Questions for married Women at Jemu and Era-Me'nit, in Me'nit Shasha Woreda.

1. When did you get married?
 - a) What was your age at that time?
 - b) How old are you now?
2. How important is marriage for you?
3. Who arranged your marriage?
4. Is bride price payment practiced in your community?
5. Did your own marriage involve bride price payment?
6. Have you participated in the decision-making process and the payment of the bride price during your own marriage?
7. Who is involved in the bride price payment process?
8. Do you know what the amount of the bride-price that was paid at the time of your own marriage?
9. If you say yes to question number 8, what are the items that are paid as a bride price for your own marriage? And if you say no, why?
10. Is bride price payment important for you in your marital life?
 - a) If your answer is yes for the above question, how?
11. Do you involve in decision-making on every issue equally with your husband at home?
12. Why is bride price payment practiced in your community?
13. What do you think about the benefits of bride price payment for?
 - a) the girl,
 - b) the boy,
 - c) the household and
 - d) the community
14. Do you think the bride price payment can negatively affect a woman's marital life?
 14. 1 If you say yes for the above question, would you please describe it?
15. Let me tell you a story. 'A man paid an expensive bride price for his first marriage. After some months, he started to nag at his wife and in-laws. He has harassed his wife several times.'
 - a) Is this case the same in your community

- b) Did you face the same problem?
- 16. How do you perceive the bride's price payment and its influence?
- 17. What do you think about the effect of bride price payment on women's rights?
- 18. Do you think it is necessary to pay a bride price at the time of marriage?
- 19. What will happen if a woman wants a divorce?
- 20. What do you think about the continuity of the practice?

B. Interview Guide Questions for married Men at Jemu and Era-Me'nit, in Me'nit Shasha Woreda.

- 1. When did you get married?
 - c) What was your age at that time?
 - d) How old are you now?
- 2. How important is marriage for you?
- 3. Who arranged your marriage?
- 4. Is bride price payment practiced in your community?
- 5. Who is/ are the decision makers in your community for the overall issues of bride price payment in the time of marriage?
- 6. Did you pay a bride price when you got married?
 - 6.1 Why did you pay the bride price?
- 7. Who is involved in the bride price payment process at your own marriage?
- 8. Do you know what was the amount of the bride-price that you paid at the time of your own marriage?
 - 8.1 If you say yes to question number 7, what are the items that you paid as a bride price for your own marriage?
- 9. Is bride price payment important for you in your marital life?
 - b) If your answer is yes for the above question, how?
- 10. Is your wife involved in decision-making on every issue equally with you at home?
- 11. Let me ask you one question. If you get married to a woman by paying a bride price in your first marriage and after some years, if you start to quarrel with each other and stay in an unhappy relationship, and finally, if she asks you to break down the marriage, what will be your response?
- 12. What do you think about the benefit of bride price payment for?

- a) the girl,
- b) the boy,

- c) the family and
- d) the community

- 13. How do you perceive the bride's price payment and its influence?
- 14. What do you think about the effect of bride price payment on women's rights?
- 15. Do you think it is necessary to pay a bride price at the time of marriage? Why?
- 16. What will happen if a woman wants a divorce?
- 17. What do you think about the continuity of the practice?

III. Questions for Focus Groups with Discussants

1. Why the community practiced bride price in the time of marriage?	To understand husband's regard	Supposed to be social security and prestige	Economic reasons	Religious Reason/ supposed to being blessed
2. What are the expected roles of women after bride price is paid	Giving birth	Domestic roles	Outdoor role	
2. How do you see the influence of bride price for women's marital life?	Positive influence	Negative Influence		
3. What problems women have faced with in the marriage due to bride price in your community?	Denial of property right	Fertility Preference	Violence	Access to legal divorce

Interview Guideline for key informants (Me'nit Shasha Woreda Women, Child, Youth Bureau and culture and tourism office experts, jemu public prosecutor office, health expert from Jemu health office, police and community elders of Me'nit people, and religious leaders).

A. Interview Guideline for Me' nit Shasha Woreda's Women, Children and Youths Office Workers/ Experts

Position _____ Sex ____ Academic status _____

1. What are the challenges of promoting gender equality in Me' nit community?
2. What do you know about the cultural practices of the Bride Price of Me 'nit community?
3. How about the extent of the bride price practice in your Woreda?
4. What are the different socio-cultural justifications of the Me' nit community for practicing bride price in the time of marriage?
5. What are the expected roles of women after the bride price is paid with in the marriage?
6. What do you think about the influence of bride price payment on women's marital life?
7. Do you think bride price can associate with gender-based violence in this area?

A) If yes how?

8. How the practices of bride price affect the status and rights of women?
 1. Do you have cases of bride price reported to your office previously?
 - a. If yes, would mention them?

B. INTERVIEW GUIDELINES FOR CULTURE AND TOURISM BUREAU OF ME 'NIT SHASHA WOREDA EXPERTS

Position _____ Sex ____ Academic status _____

1. How do look the culture of Bride price of Me 'nit community?
2. What do you think about the influence of bride price payment on women's marital life?

3. What are the major problems that encounter women in marriage as a result of bride price?
4. What about the impacts of the bride price practice on women's rights?
5. How about the extent of the bride price practices in Me 'nit shahsa Woreda?

C. Interview Guidelines for Health expert from Me 'nit Shasha Woreda Experts

Position _____ Sex ____ Academic status _____

1. What are the major health problems that encounter women in marriage as a result of bride price?
2. How do you see the women's fertility preference in this area?

D. Interview Guideline for Me 'nit Shasha Woreda's public prosecutor and police Office

Position _____ Sex ____ Academic status _____

1. What do you think about the influence of bride price payment on women's marital life?
2. What do you think that the attitudes and perception of the society towards the bride price practice for marriage?
3. What is the essence of law with the socio-cultural system of the society particularly bride price practice in the area?
4. Do you think that the customary practice of bride price violates basic rights of women in marriage? If yes how and what are these rights?

E. Interview Guideline for Me 'nit Shasha Woreda's Elderly peoples of the community and religious leaders

1. What is bride price among Me'en community?
2. How marriage is conducted in your community?
3. What is the relationships of Bride price and marriage among Me;en community?
4. What are the different socio-cultural justifications of the Me' nit community for practicing bride price in the time of marriage?

5. What do you think about the perception of the society towards the bride price practice for marriage?
6. What are the expected roles of women after the bride price is paid with in the marriage?
7. What kinds of women's rights are violated within marriage as a result of the customary practice of bride price?
8. How you can understand the influences of bride price payment on women's marital life?

IV. Background of informants

As most qualitative research data is based on participants; thus, this paper was conducted based on the data from both married men and women participants and community members of Me'en from Me'nit shasha woreda. The participants for in-depth interview's marital status, age level, educational and religious background have been identified. Accordingly, the age rate of informants for in-depth interviews was in the range of the following: 15-20, 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50 and above 50. In terms of religious background, one of the fifteen male informants was an orthodox follower, twelve were protestant followers, and the remaining two were followers of other religions such as traditional beliefs. Seven (7) out of the fifteen were found to be illiterate, while the other seven (7) could read and write, and lastly, only one (1) participant attained primary level out of the fifteen in-depth interview informants. The fifteen participants were asked to respond to all the research questions in their chosen language, Me'en or Amharic, through an interview using a translator.

Table 1: Characteristics of Informants for In-depth – interviews.

Sex	Informants' Age Level								Total	
	15 – 20	21 – 25	26 – 30	31 – 35	36 – 40	41- 45	46 - 50	Above 50		
Male	-	1	2	1	1		1	1	7	
Female	1	1	2	2	1	1	-	-	8	
Both Sex	1	2	4	3	2	1	1	1	15	
Religious Background										
Sex	Orthodox	Protestant	Catholic	Others			Total			

Male	1	5	--	1	7
Female	0	7	---	1	8
Both Sex	1	12	----	2	15

Educational Level of Informants

Sex	Illiterate	Can read & write	Primary level completed	Secondary level completed	Diploma level completed	Degree & Above	Total
Male	2	4	1	-----	----	-----	7
Female	5	3	0	-----	-----	-----	8
Both Sex	7	7	1	-----			15

Marital Status of Informants

Sex	Never married	Married	Widowed	Divorced	Total
Female	----	8	-----	-----	
Male	-----	7	-----	-----	
Both sex		15			15

Table 2: Background of the Key Informants of the Governmental institutions

R. No	Institutions	Positions	Sex	Academic status
1	Me' nit Shasha Woreda's Women children and youth affair office	Women and Children's right protection expert	Female	Degree
2	Me' nit Shasha Woreda's Women Children and youth affair office	Gender Expert on Women and youth empowerment expert	Male	Diploma
3	Me' nit Shasha Woreda's Public Prosecutor Office	Public Prosecutor	Male	Degree
4	Me' nit Shasha Woreda's culture and tourism office	Head	Male	Diploma
5	Me' nit Shasha Woreda's Health office.	Women and children Officer	Male	Degree
6	Me' nit Shasha Woreda's police office	Detective police	Male	Diploma
7	Community elders of Me' nit people	Community Elder	Male	10 ⁺²
8	spiritual leader from Me' nit	Priest in Protestant church	Male	Diploma
	Total			8

Table 3: Background of Focus Group Discussants

Focus Group Discussants (FGD)	Kebeles				Total number
FGDs <i>One and Two</i> respectively	Era-Me' nit	<u>Nos</u>	Jemu	<u>Nos</u>	12
	Married Women	6	Married Women	6	
FGDs Three			Held with the elected Married Men from Both Kebeles	6	6
FGDs Four			Held with the Elected Elders and Religious Leaders from both kebeles	6	6
Total number of Focus Group Discussants					24

