

**The Impact of Divorce on the Wellbeing of Children *in Lideta* Sub
City Administration of Addis Ababa: Children's Perspectives**

MSW Dissertation Research Project Proposal

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

According to Brotherson and Duncan (2004) divorce is the oldest social problem in human history. It is usually found along with the basic social institution called marriage. Further, Brotherson and Duncan described that marriage is a reference point for divorce. Divorce is directly related with the institution of marriage because it is the dissolution of marriage ties. Marriage is, thus, the only best reference for the analysis of divorce as a social problem. It is the impact of the dissolution of marital ties of spouses that always triggers people to seriously complain against the issue as a burning question of a society. That is why almost all governments in the world exert efforts in strengthening the stability of marital bonds through a variety of approaches. The societal trends in relation with family formation, marriage, and divorce often shape the interests of people in treating marriage to be stable as one of the social institutions

Divorce has its own impact on the lives of children. A child's perception of divorce will be largely determined by age and gender, as well as the child's history of stress and coping (Matthews, 2011, P.3). When stressful events outweigh available protective factors, even the most resilient child can develop problems. A growing body of information suggests that certain factors may make some children more at risk for maladjustment than other children. Some are unalterable and some existed before divorce. Others exert considerable pressure on children at the time of separation or divorce, and still others influence the children following divorce (Matthews, 2011, P.3). Most divorcing parents are very concerned about their children's reactions to their separation and divorce (DeBord, 1997, p.1). They want to know whether their

children will grow to be healthy and happy or not. Research shows that the effects of divorce depend on the age of the child at the time of divorce. It can also depend on the child's gender and personality, the amount of conflict between parents and the support provided by friends and family (DeBord, 1997, p.1).

The Impacts of Parental divorce on children as many researchers agree it's not uniform due to age of developmental stage, nature of temperament, the way their parents handled the process and post divorce changes including the economic and social change. (Furstenberg and Kiernan 2001). Among much theoretical explanation, the economist, sociological and developmental psychologist frame of analysis are included.

To explain the impact of parental divorce on children the economist theory focus on the accumulation of resources in the family will change by divorce. Although there are adverse effects of persistent conflict in the family, the presence of both parents according to sociological and developmental psychologist raises skills, social capital, opportunities and a wider network of support for physical and social wellbeing and will serve as a spring board to the success and live achievements (IBD). This is because divorces parents with children will not able to raise the social capital after divorce all many responsibilities in and outside home.

The impact of divorce on the parent child relationships started before the divorce. The negative consequence of divorce on children according to Defrain and Olson (2000) includes distress, fewer ties with kin and friends, less happy marriage and a greater probability of future divorce were great in families where there was high conflict before divorce. Similar study by Chase Landsdale, Cherlin and Kierman in Great Britain (1995) cited in Defrain etal (2000) reported

that the negative consequence of divorce vary in degree depending on the emotional and behavioral problem of children before divorce.

The same study by Amato and Booth (1997) also found that the negative effects of divorce on the relationships of parents with their children greatly affects father's affection for children but not mother. The relationship of parents with their children is affected by the relationship between the two parents which negatively or positively affects the wellbeing of their child or children.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) article (12) states that parties shall assure to the child, who is capable of forming his or her own views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting him or her and the views to be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Marriage and divorce in Ethiopia have a long history. Throughout this history, the marriage institution in the country has been challenged by the prevalence of higher divorce rates (Abate & Morgan, 1986). However, the impacts and the severity of divorce have different trends across different time in the country. In the contemporary Ethiopian society, the rate of divorce is by far higher than any previous time (Abate & Morgan, 1986). According to some research conducted, Ethiopia is among the countries having the highest divorce rate in the world (IBD). Tilson and Larson (2001) reported that 45 per cent of first marriage in Ethiopia ends in divorce within 30 years, and two-third of women and men who divorce do so within the first five years of their marriage.

In a study assessing parental divorce impact on children in Dessie Sisay (1997) showed that adolescents from divorced families had more psychological and social adjustment problems than children from stable families. The impact of divorce is further complicated as indicated in the study that adolescent from step mother families had psychological adjustment problems great more often than those from single mother families (IBD) .

The improved family code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia states that if divorce has adverse effect on the wellbeing of children the court has the mandate to see the cases in favor of children (Family code, 200(80)(3).However, during the implementation procedure the voices of children are not heard. .

Therefore, this study will attempt to assess the consequences of divorce on the wellbeing of children in Addis Ababa City Administration at *Lideta* Sub City. Despite the greater impact of divorce in the city, research in this area is limited and fragmented. The researcher will gather primary data and will attempt to get access to secondary sources relevant to the topic from *Addis Ababa* city administration *Lideta sub city* Women, Children and Youth office.

2. Statement of the Problem

A growing body of ‘divorce research’ has shown that divorce experience reaches beyond the lives of the marital partners to encompass their children and to some extent their kin and their social networks (Robertson, 1986, p. 147). Besides, Robertson also explained that the establishment in the western world of laws for ending of marriage by divorce is usually explained in terms of changing religious and familial ideologies. (Robertson, 1986, p. 147) .

There are several arguments among scholars on the consequences of divorce. One of such debates is concerned with the impacts of divorce on children. Some studies show the prevalence of strong effect of divorce on children while others argue that the differences between children of divorced parents and children of continually married parents or intact families are overestimated (Parrilo, 2008). However, most experts agree that children of divorced family has more negative outcomes on the education achievement, delinquency and crime, psychological well-being, teenage pregnancy, and behaviors when compared with children of “intact” family (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; and Parrilo, 2008).

This particular research describes the economic and social impact of divorce and develops contextual ways of care and custody for the children of divorced families. The researcher believes that the issue was so far not properly addressed by the *Addis Ababa City Administration Lideta sub city* Women, Children and Youth office and the problems of children were overlooked.

From the verbal information the researcher gained from the court officials the rate, prevalence and incidence of divorce is increasing at an alarming rate in *Addis Ababa city particularly Lideta Sub City*. According to the information I gathered from the local office, at least ten couples appeal for divorce per day to the court. From my observation in the town divorcees see one another in most cases as enemies. Even though it has to be assured by further research evidence, this poor relationship has an adverse impact on the social wellbeing of children. Afework argued divorce to be the most serious problem of the society (Afework, 2010).

In my view divorce should not be seen only from the angle of the marital partners. Its impact on the lives of children should also be looked at since it disintegrates the family unity. It is a social

evil in itself and major contributing factors for most of societies ill such as prostitution, streetism, juvenile delinquency, homosexuality, drug addiction, alcoholism and other crimes (Afework, 2010).

According to Rahel, (1992) the real cost of divorce in terms of emotional, social and economic costs to the individuals involved, their children, their partners, friends and to the society they live in is devastating. Serkalem,(2006) made similar study on the impact of divorce on women and children but she did not address the issues of contextual care and custody and she also overlooked the decision of children in divorcing partners and the dissociation of children from their extended families. Zenaye, (2008) addressed the principle of the best interest of the child. She argued that custody decision should precede the decision of the divorce itself and emphasized that children have to have a say in matters affecting their lives and the battle over legal custodies is instrumental that is to save the child support money.

Divorce affects the state or condition of being well; a condition characterized by loss of happiness, of children of divorced parents, it affects their health or prosperity: moral or physical welfare and affects an achievable degree of economic wellbeing. Parents are responsible for the economic, social, psychological and physical wellbeing of their child/children. (Webster's international 3rd edition dictionary) . Some psychological impacts are stress that can lead to anxiety, depression, substance abuse, mood swing. Sometimes, the children even make suicide attempts. Children from divorced family are socially isolated, they have poor peer relationship, they are less sociable they have fewer close friends, spend less time with friends. And economically children from disrupted family might not get enough, health services, getting educational materials, books toys and other resources they need.

The studies made so far did not address some of the issues in this research topic and totally not undertaken in *Addis Ababa City Administration Lideta Sub City* and endeavors so far ignored impacts of divorce on the wellbeing of children and contextual care and custody from the perspectives of children. Therefore, the researcher of this topic aims to assess the following research questions.

General Research Questions

To conduct this study the researcher inquires the general question, how divorce affects the child's /children's wellbeing and develop contextual care and custody. This general question is further sub divided into the following specific research questions. Specifically, the study intends to answer the following questions:

1. What are the economic impacts of divorce on the wellbeing of children?
2. What are the social impacts of divorce on the wellbeing of children?
3. What are the psychological(emotional/happiness) impacts of divorce on the wellbeing of children?.....
4. How can we develop contextual ways of care and custody for children in post-divorce families?
5. What are the levels of service delivery to the children from broken families?

4. Objectives of the Study

For this study, the broad objective is to describe and explore the impacts of divorce on the wellbeing of children. The study more specifically addresses the following specific objectives.

1. To describe and explore the economic impacts of divorce on children's wellbeing.

2. To describe and explore the impacts of divorce on children's social wellbeing.
3. To suggest ways of developing contextual care and custody for children of divorced families.
4. To describe and explore the service delivery of Lideta sub City Women, Children and Youth Affairs office to the children of divorced families

This study employs quantitative and qualitative approaches of data collection.

5. Significance of the Study

- The study might be significant for divorcing couples to critically analyze their decisions for divorce and see ways of arrangements for the wellbeing of their child (children).
- For institutions under investigation to enhance divorce related environment by understanding the needs of the children, they will be able to devise a mechanism to and improve their service.
- For decision makers (like, The Youth, Children and Women's Affairs Bureau, the court House of peoples representative and Ethiopian human right commission), it is a good stepping stone to design and implement appropriate policy.
- For the researcher to enhance the existing theoretical knowledge concerning divorce and its impact on the wellbeing of children.
- For interested individuals and researchers to lay ground to conduct a wide and in-depth study with respect to divorce and its impact on the wellbeing of children.

6. Scope (delimitation) of the study

This study is going to undertake in Addis Ababa City Administration, Lideta Sub City. The study covers children age from 10-18, family with children only , the children will accessed through the Sub City Women children and Youth Affairs office. The research is limited to the findings obtained from the participants of this study.

7. Limitation of the study

The expected limitation is time limitation and financial problems since it is funded from my own pocket. Non responsiveness from the respondents might also be expected limitation. And lack of well organized prior studies and secondary sources.

8. Operational Definitions of Terms

Child: For the purpose of this MSW dissertation, Child is human being with parents are separated or divorced and whose ages between 10 to 18 years. This age range is purposely determined age group of the researcher to get more independent responses from the child. This definition includes all boys and girls whose parents have stayed from 2 to 5 years after their separation or divorce and are living in Addis Ababa city Administration, Lideta Sub city, whose parents are both alive. It does not include child/children from intact families and whose parent(s) passed away.

Custodial Arrangements: is about with whom the child or children live after the separation or divorce of their parents. It tells us about the space, the time and condition under which the child (children) are living. From the experience of different countries custodial arrangement is contextual and differs from country to country and across sub cultures. Some of the children live with their mother from Monday to Friday and visit their father on weekends. There is still experience of different traditions where fathers visit their child/children at their mothers home and supervise randomly about their food, hygiene, secured attachment, in secured attachment and avoidant attachments and might claim custody of their child /children or suggest better well being of the child/children. Joint custodial arrangement is not practiced in many developing countries and it is the practice of western cultures.

Intact Family: This study is not comparative and the researcher is not interested in describing or exploring the intact family. Intact family is unbroken, stable family for the time being but which might endure or breakdown in the future.

Family: The researcher operationally defines family in its multiple forms in the globe. These are nuclear family, extended family, conjugal family , gay family, lesbian family, reformed family, broken family, family of orientation, family of origin ...etc. The focus of the researcher is on broken families with child /children who have lived for 2 to 5 years after their separation or divorce, according to my definition these are bi-nuclear families where one nuclear family is broken in to two and still children are perceiving them still as a nuclear family. The other interests of the researcher are nuclear and extended families. The extended families include: grandparents, parents, children, grand children, uncles and aunts who are supposed to be the potential resources for the children of broken homes. These extended families of the child might go beyond the current residence of the child and translocal. Nuclear families are families with husband, wife and child/children.

Child Parent relationships: parental divorce might affect the parent-child relationship and might disrupt the equilibrium of the relationship. This disequilibrium has adverse impact on the lives of the child. A post divorce parent child relationship requires independent study by itself, but the researcher is interested to describe and explore some of the impacts of this relationship on the wellbeing of children. The positive or negative relationships have impacts on the economic, social, psychological, contextual and custodial arrangements of the child/children of broken homes.

Wellbeing: divorce affects the state or condition of being well; a condition characterized by loss of happiness, of children of divorced parents, its affects their health or prosperity: moral or physical welfare and affects an achievable degree of economic wellbeing. Parents are responsible for the economic, social, psychological and physical wellbeing of their child/children (emphasis added).

Social Wellbeing: is refers to ability to interact successfully within a community, with a peer groups, having fun and meeting friends. As a member of a community, develop satisfying relationships, a capacity for intimacy, an understanding of self in relation to others, and a sense of belonging.

Psychological wellbeing: the child/children sense of how happy or content feels with life and also about being actively engaged with life and with other people.

Economic wellbeing: for the purpose of this study, economic wellbeing defines the resources for children's nutrition, health services, and support of educational materials, support of books toys and other resources they need.

Impact of divorce: are multifaceted. For the purpose of this study divorce has different impact on the divorcees and their child/children such as economic, social and psychological impacts on the lives of children of divorcees. The researcher describes and explores these impacts in depth.

9. Research design and Methods

To undertake this quantitative and qualitative research, the researcher will employ descriptive and exploratory research designs. By using these designs the researcher will thematize the impacts of divorce on the wellbeing of children. The themes will be the economic impacts of divorce, the social impacts of divorce and the psychological on children's wellbeing as well as their choices of care and custody. Among the qualitative research strategies the researcher selected case studies and key informants by using individual in-depth interviews. From the 65 paramater, 56 individual participants comprising equal or approximately equal number of boys and girls whose parents were divorced will be selected by the use of random number table and purposively for this particular study. The respondents selected for the case will be children of divorcees whose parents stayed separated or divorced from two to five years. To achieve the objective of study it has been decided that the most appropriate method to be employed will be cross sectional survey, case studies and key informants. This study will be carried out in Addis Ababa City Administration, Lideta Sub City Women, Children and Youth Affairs office.

10. Universe of the Study

The study is going to be undertaken in Addis Ababa City Administration *Lideta* Sub City Women, Children and Youth Affairs office. The total population of the sub city according to the 2007 national population census is 201,613. The total population of the children whose parents were either separated or divorced is dynamic over time and as per the source in *Lideta* Sub City Women, Children and Youth Affairs office there are about 200 children of divorcees in the sub city; but the researcher purposively selects 65 respondents out of which 56 will be selected, according to IGNOU standard, to be studied by this particular research.

The study will be limited to the discussion of the economic, social and psychological impacts of divorce on fifty six children whose parents were divorced and who lived two to five years after their parents got divorced and suggests ways of care and custody. Even if the study is limited to this number of children the information obtained can provide important conceptual understanding to the impacts of divorce on children's lives and how to intervene in the decisions of parents who undergo the experience, from a social work perspective. The researcher could not include those purposively selected samples who denied filling the informed consent form prepared for this specific research.

11. Sampling Methods

The researcher selects the participants of the study by using random number table by attaching the random numbers to the parameter (65) and selects the two digit 56 respondents from this universe for the quantitative inquiry and for qualitative study purposively selects the respondents for case studies and key informant interviews. The respondents will be accessed from the court information and by the help of Lideta Sub City Women, Children and Youth Affairs Office and will be asked consent from one or both parents and asking them consent.

12. Tools and Procedures of Data Collection

Interview schedule (interview questionnaire) will be conducted by the researcher herself, for key informant studies, the researcher will used key informant interview and interview guide would be used to collect the primary data for the research participants.

The researcher combined the two approaches of data collection because they are problem centered consequence oriented and pluralistic. The researcher choice interview questionnaire because it can be administer easily. And also some children's might not read and write properly.

In addition while interviewing the participants the researcher can read the respondents emotions and opinion.

Ethical Considerations

Research on the issue of children requires care and sensitivity to the issue. Making ethical consideration is imperative and basic part of the methodology of the research. Any research dealing with children should follow the ethical guide lines of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the society for research in child development (APA, 6th edition).

The first guide line is to consider the risks and benefits of the study. Researchers should conduct studies only when the potential benefits outweigh any known risks. The study had no potential or actual risk on the study participants. But any researcher involving children should be cautious in handling ethical issues not to be threatening.

The second ethical consideration is to follow none harmful procedures. This is to mean researchers should not use procedures that could harm a child either physically or psychologically. The third ethical consideration is to get informed consent. I will use a written informed consent form for all of the respondents' families, guardians or care givers. The informed consent will be translated into *Amharic* version and will be attached to the interview questionnaire (schedule) and guide questions.

The other benefit is divorcing couples might use the results of the study to critically revise their decisions on divorce and its impacts on their child or children. The objective of the research will be clearly defined to all respondents. They will be clearly informed that there is no superior or inferior power relationship with the respondents and the researcher. The respondents will be informed that each of them can withdraw from the interview with or without prior notification.

The fourth one is unforeseen consequences. There is no negative consequence of the findings that affects the lives of the children. Because it is meant for academic purposes to fulfill the requirements of Master of Social Work (MSW) and once the grade in the thesis is secured every document whether anonymous or that clearly identifies the respondents will be discarded. The researcher has no objective other than the requirements for the Master of Social Work and I am dead sure not to abuse or manipulate the participants of the study and their voices that will be collected verbally and in recorded forms. Anonymity will be maintained throughout the process of the research and names identified in the findings are pseudonyms. If a research procedure results in any negative consequence for a child, the researcher must do whatever is necessary to correct the situation.

The fifth is privacy. Researchers must keep all information obtained from participants confidential. The last is implications of research. Researchers must be aware of social, political and human implications not only of the research but also of how it is presented to colleagues and the public (Cook, 2005, pp.29-30).

Therefore, based on the above mentioned scientific research procedures the participants who fulfilled the inclusion criteria would be interviewed. The analysis will be done by refining the limitations of the first data going forth and back. The researcher never violates the ethical considerations discussed under this section.

13. Data Processing and Analysis

Once collected, the data has to be scrutinized according to the themes and questions of research. Data is basic information and not knowledge by itself. Transforming data into knowledge requires specific research method(s). Therefore, in order to transform the data into knowledge the content of the data will be organized and then analyzed. Frequency percentage will be used to analyze the quantitative data. There will be thematic categorization of the research questions and

arranging the findings according to the categories. Coding will be done manually. The completed interview schedule, interview guide and key informant interview shall be scrutinized, verified, edited and arranged serially. The following procedures and activities will be undertaken during data analysis process.

To conduct this research the researcher will record some of the voices of the research participants. The voices will be transcribed into *Amharic* and then translated into equivalent English versions. After reading the transcripts repeatedly to understand the main issues in detail then manual coding will be started. Using different colors, informants' sayings will be highlighted whenever they have relevance with the topic of the study. The codes will be brought together for categorizing purposes. Finally, the main themes will be identified and the categories will be brought together and rearranged under predetermined themes. Pseudo names will be provided for the informants instead of their proper names to respect privacy and maintain anonymity of the respondents.

Tables

Different tables will be produced from the findings of the study. The number of the tables will be decided after the data is collected and serially arranged.

14. Chapterization

The chapterization of the thesis is proposed to be made keeping the three objectives of the study in mind. The first chapter shall be an introduction to the research topic, the Impacts of Divorce on the Wellbeing of Children: Children's Perspectives. The second chapter shall deal with research design of the thesis. Review of related literature and ecological systems theory shall be included in the third chapter. The fourth chapter shall be on the findings, analysis and interpretation of the outcomes of the study by thematizing according to the economic and social

impacts of divorce on the wellbeing of children and the contextual care and custody for the children of broken homes. The fifth chapter would be devoted to the conclusion and the recommendation of the study.

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