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Family assessment in Ethiopia: Reasons and resiliencies of separated families

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ABSTRACT

Families are at the heart of stability and happiness. Yet families are sometimes leading a life in turmoil. Using an in-depth case study of one family, the study aimed at investigating family assessment to identify reasons and understand resiliencies of separated family in Ethiopia. Data were collected via in-depth interview, document analysis and observation. Family members were in conflict due to suspected unfaithfulness, sole decision making and dysfunctional family structure. The study found that Chaltu, who was a mother, followed a harsh parenting style in handling her children. Bulcha, who was the father, failed to provide love and affection that is expected from fatherhood. From a resilience perspective, Chaltu was heartedly motivated, energized and inspired to be assisted to have open communication and discussion with her husband regarding how to capacitate and empower their children be it psychologically, emotionally, financially, academically and instrumentally aiming at making them independent in leading their life in the long-run in consideration of their strengths. Social work professionals should come to the front as change agents in teaching psychoeducation and co-parenting for the spouses in order to nurture their children successfully.

KEY TERMS: family assessment, Ethiopia, reasons, cultivating resilience, separated family

AXEREERAA (Afan Oromo)

Maatiin madda tasgabbiifi gammachuuti. Ta'us yeroo tokko tokko maatii keessatti waldhabiinsi jiraachuu danda'a. Qorannoon kun mala afgaaffiitti fayyadamuudhan Itiyooophiyaa keessatti waldhibdee yookiin addabahiinsa sakattiinsa maatii tokko keessatti uumame sababiiwwaniifi akkamitti akka dandammachuu danda'an irratti kan xiyyeeffatedha. Tooftaaleen raga qorannoo kanaa afgaaffii, ragaalee maxxanfamanittiifi daawwannaatti dhimma ba'ameera. Adda bahiinsa maatiif ka'umsa kan tahu waliif amanamuu dhabuu, kophaa ofii murteessuu, haala yeroo wajjin deemuu dhabuu, walsamicha gahee miseensota maatii gidduutti uumamuufi caasaa maatii sirna isaanii hineegganne. Akka qorannoon agarsiisuutti, Caaltuun akka haadha warratti maatii ishee haala dimookiraatawaa hintaanen kan guddistedha. Bulchaan akka abbaatti miseensota maatii isaatiif jaalala quubsaa tahe akka abbummaa isaatti hinkennine. Gama ilaalcha dandammachuutiin, Caaltuun rakkoo isheen abbaa manaa ishee wajjin qabdu seexaa gaariifi abdiin karaa ifaafi bilisa taheeniifi rakkoolleen ijoolee isaanii gama diinagdeen, hawaasummaan, xinsammuun, and barumsaan qaban furachuuf kutannoo qabachuu ishee agarsiistee jirti. Kunis kan milkaa'u danda'u cimina maatii xiyyeeffannoo keessaa galchuudhani. Rakkoo addabahiinsa maatii kana furuuf, ogeessotni saayinsii hawaasaa maatii kana haala qabiinsa maatiifi guddisaa barsiisuu qabu akasumas gargaarsa xinsammuufi gorsa ogeessaa argachuu qabu.

JECHOOTAA IJOO: sakattiinsa maatii, Itiyooophiyaa, sababiiwwan, dandammachuu, addabahiinsa maatii

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INTRODUCTION

Families are at the heart of stability and happiness. Yet families are sometimes leading conflictual lives. The sources of family conflict include lack of money of basic needs, unemployment, social relationship, and moral and traditions of partners. Family conflict can be as a result of lack of trust, drunkenness, lack of dialogue, lack of respect, joblessness and idleness. It manifests itself in the form of fights, quarrels, spouse battering and child abuses. It can result in a bad atmosphere in the home, separation or even divorce. On the other hand, this situation can be reversible if resiliencies are cultivated well. The study dealt with family assessment in Ethiopia using a case study and identified reasons that lead to separation and how resilience could be achieved.

BACKGROUND

Divorce has devastating effects on partners, children, family and the wider community. The effects of divorce on children are psychological, social, emotional and economical (Eyo, 2018). Divorce is a major life stressor for the individuals involved, with potentially strong negative consequences for the mental and physical health of all members of the family. Divorce leads custodial parents to experience major changes in their lives including a change in residential arrangements, economic disadvantage, loneliness associated with social network changes, and role strain associated with the task overload that results from having to care for children and work outside the home. In divorced couple's residential arrangements, economic status, social networks and role demands lead to deterioration in physical and mental health for the majority of individuals immediately following separation (Damota, 2019).

The effects of the psychological functioning of the adolescents were revealed in different ways depending on the individuals. These effects were identified as feelings of anger, feelings of abandonment, helplessness and self-blame, self-mutilation, confusion, depression, and mixed feelings of anger, loss, trauma and loneliness. The effects of parental divorce may be permanent and therefore cause the child to conclude issues that will have negative impacts on them for the rest of their lives. They might have lost meaning of parents and family; they might be confused about marriage and their children may have in their future (Sehlabaka, 2014). Similarly, due to the effects of divorce and separation, parents and children experienced feelings of sadness, distress, abandonment, anger, helplessness, and stress (Adam, 2010). Divorce in turn can be a cause for drunkenness, and it also leads to have a loose relation between fathers and their children. Furthermore, lack of fulfilling basic needs of children's, reduction of income and economic crisis are also the main economic consequences of divorce. Divorcees and their children were considering themselves as neglected and isolated by the society and feel in stress and become dissatisfied in their life. Children of divorced families develop inferiority complex due to feeling of helplessness and hopeless and later develop distrust for their relatives (Yeshiwork, Koye & Meseret, 2019).

On the other hand, resilience is evident to surmount family conflict, family separation, family breakdown and divorce. Resilience is seen as a personal trait that allowed individuals who are at risk or threat of loss to adjust and continue to have a normal life despite adversity. It addresses the interplay between risk and protective processes (Turluc, Măirean & Dănilă, 2013). Protective factors are categorized into three groups: individual, family, and community. Individual protective factors included character traits, personal strategies, and individual abilities that helped the participants to be resilient. Family protective factors included both immediate and extended family members. Within the community, participants identified friends and activities as community protective factors. Resilience is defined as bouncing back with a general overall positive adaptation from parental breakdown transition, both the event and the process (Thomas, 2011).

In Ethiopia, family assessment is rarely considered by academia community to investigate in identifying the problems and analyzing and suggesting the feasible resilience in order to bounce back the problems of separated family as far as the author was concerned. Thus, the study aimed at investigating family assessment to cultivate resilience for separated families in Ethiopia.

METHODS

The study used qualitative method to allow the participants to discover their own experiences and perspectives of a phenomenon verbatim. Case study was also employed to describe the issue at hand in detailed and rich descriptive way. The study contacted the family via one of employees of local organization in Oromia National Regional State. Oromia covers the largest geographical territory and Oromo is the largest people in Ethiopia. The study conducted five sessions with the family. The first session was held with a mother of family, Chaltu. The second, session was undertaken with a father of family, Bulcha. The third interview was carried out with elder daughter, Derartu. The fourth session was conducted with son of family, Lamessa. The fifth interview was finalized with mother of Bulcha, Dureti. The study employed assessment methods such as observation, document analysis and in-depth interview. Observation was utilized to capture unspoken stories and non-verbal communication clues as well as since study was conducted at family's home, observation was helpful to interpret

environmental situations they were living in. In the study, ethical consideration has got paramount importance in order to be ethically guided as per social work profession. Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity were highly maintained. The study used anonymity of family members by using pseudonyms.

RESULTS

Dimensions of family assessment

Family context

The husband and the wife, namely Bulcha Tola and Chaltu Kuma, got married in 1997 nearly 23 years ago. After they were living together in harmony for twenty-one years they eventually started living under different rooms after protracted quarreling in 2018. They have got three children, two daughters and a son from their marriage. The two daughters were called Derartu Bulcha and Ayantu Bulcha as well as a son was named as Lamessa Bulcha. Dureti Bali was the mother of Bulcha Tola. Deratu was 19 years old and she was attending grade eleven at Shino High School. Lamessa was 18 aged and he was a student of grade ten at the same school of his sister. Ayantu is 10 years old and she was attending grade 4 at Garbi Bulto Elementary School. Chaltu Kuma has been serving as housewife. She did not have any formal or informal income generating activity. Bulcha Tola has been working in one of governmental organizations and his salary was 5200 (five thousand two hundred) birr. Altogether they have had only 5200 birr income per month. From this salary, rent of house is paid, monthly consumable items are covered, clothes for families are bought, and some goods are purchased.

The childhood history of the couples

The study reveals that Chaltu grew up in an extended family. But literally the extended family she grew up in is not her consanguineous family. She narrated as follows:

My mother had been toiling day and night that way for many years, she sorrowfully, at the end of the day, passed away when I was still a dependent little child wanting more of her care and love. Since she had no relatives here in the town to take care of me, this family she used to work for took humanely the stewardship of taking care of me as my foster carers. Thus, they took care of me till the day I got married to my husband and started living my own life.

With regard to her childhood life, she vented her regret that she did not get what she should have got as a child from her orientation family. She remorsefully stated that her orientation family did not treat her emotionally and materially the same way they treated their own children. Consequently, she said that all the maltreatments she faced throughout her childhood are her reminding pains concerning what it feels being mistreated as a child thereby obliging her to abstain herself from mistreating her daughters. And thus, she avers that she does not want her daughters to grow up the way she grew up being denied parental affections and cares they are supposed to get as children.

As to the accounts of her orientation family too, during her childhood, she was vibrant, playful, obedient and self-confident. During the interview, she still sounds tremendously self-confident and her stance in shunning outlandish wearing style and outfit is still intact. But above all, throughout her talks, she now and then mentioned about parental care and affection. Leaning on that, she did not get adequate parental affection and care during her childhood. It, nevertheless, seems to have been a good lesson for her to try to provide her daughters with care and affection as she had faced the pain of being mistreated and denied of parental care and affection.

On the other hand, she wants to apply to her daughters some of the disciplines that she inherited from her orientation family and believes are deemed flawless. Thus, whenever her daughters breach those disciplines; she exhibits zero tolerance for them. Among these disciplines, she does not allow her daughters to follow fashion which she believes is among plenty of factors that make them susceptible to sexual harassment. Pertaining to managing the behaviors and actions of her daughters, she is so strict that she always quarrels with them and batters them whenever she runs out of patience. On the contrary, the daughters especially the elder one is so adamant not to shun fashion that their relationship has been totally volatile.

Bulcha grew up in an extended family, too. Unlike Chaltu's orientation family, Bulcha's orientation family is rather progressive and democratic. They do not manage and control each and every step and deed of their children despite core disciplines that the children should abide by for normal functioning of the family. His orientation family was so open that they could freely discuss any issue with parents without a hitch like normal friends of the same age and status. Unlike his wife, namely Chaltu, Bulcha grew up with his parents getting their bolstering care and affection.

Broadly speaking the strengths of the family include the capacity of the parents to generate a steady income so as to meet the needs of the family, the frequent attendance of church by the mother and her daughter thereby beefing up the family's social networks, an aspiration and motivation to progress and change despite the familial trouble they are stuck in, the schools of their children, orientation family of Bulcha, the friends of each member of the family, academic achievement of their children particularly Lamessa is a top scorer and the Women, Children and Youth Affairs Office. Bulcha's mother, Dureti, is always welcome to every family members including Chaltu even after separation.

Power structure of the family

The power structure is predominately matriarchal as many important familial decisions are made by mother. So, the mother assumes the lion's share power in the family and is hierarchically seated at the top. Next, the father is positioned in the power structure hierarchy of the family. Thus, less important decisions are made by the father. The next immediate positions in the familial power structure hierarchy are occupied by the elder daughter, the younger son and the youngest daughter respectively.

It is observed from Chaltu's family, the nature of boundary is rigid and inflexible to accommodate the dynamic nature of family life. Chaltu gave deaf ear for her daughter's voice as well as she is ignorant of the role expected from her as mother of young and elder daughter. Her elder daughter becomes stronger enough to insist her to change her way of parenting. The boundary is maintained through following rules of dressing style, curfew, and silence when Chaltu is speaking. These rules are found to be oppressive to the family members especially, the elder daughter. Chaltu's motto is "what I said goes." Chaltu is the main actress in decision making process though Bulcha is a breadwinner for the family. In addition, Chaltu is primarily responsible in managing the household income, monitoring household chores, and caring for her children. The major goal of the family is to enable the three children to become academically successful so that they can stand by the family at the end of the day. The second goal of the family is to reunion.

Myth, role and communication style

The children were told about the origin of their family and Chaltu's origin of family is not yet traced. Since Chaltu has lost her both origin of parents, she wanted her children to be human in their life future. This is being done to compensate love and affection what she has lost during her childhood. Thus, Chaltu is expected from her daughters to be educated and get married appropriately under normal circumstance. Above and beyond, Chaltu has an ambition to expand her generations by having a number of children that she lacked. She intends to have these children supposed that her husband was loving, caring and nurturing extended family. On the other hand, Bulcha was born in respected and extended family which is characterized by strong belongingness and mutual support between his parents. This is due to the existence of the stereotype and labeling associated with her kinlessness. Such myth has also influenced children's thinking as their mother is kinless.

Regarding family roles, Chaltu is a housewife. She is discharging reproductive role primarily. Bulcha is a breadwinner. He is an employee in public organization. The children's roles are students. The communication style of family is comprised of verbal and non-verbal. For example, Bulcha is expressing his anger and discontent by being silent and leaving his home. Chaltu on her way expressed anger and disturbance on the spot like shouting, screaming, and beating her children. Derartu complains that her mother does not meet her needs despite the fact that her mother sincerely dreams of her daughter's bright future achieved academically along with good discipline. Beyond this, there is not a culture of open communication concerning family's matters.

Reasons of family separation

Parental separation

They are not legally divorced but they claim to have already got separated. But surprising is that they still occasionally talk to each other on phone and sometimes Bulcha goes to contact his children at home. Bulcha lives and spends night with his mother, Dureti. The signal of their separation went noticeable when one day Bulcha after a prolonged quarrel with Chaltu went out and never returned home. Fathoming that he has adamantly abandoned the family and becoming fed up with the recurring quarrel with his wife. Derartu went to a nearby Women, Children, and Youth Affairs Office and filed a case against her parents. Then the Office summoned Bulcha and ordered him to allot a fixed monthly sum of money to the family. Ever since then, he has been financially, if not emotionally, standing by the family. Occasionally, he backs them up materially out of his own good will.

The study approached the causes of the separation of the couples from the perspectives of both the partners: namely Bulcha and Chaltu. Both of them, however, put forward different factors for their separation. The study,

however, tried to interpret the two's perspective hinging on the subtle signals they gave off throughout their talks. Asked what the principal factor for their separation is, Chaltu narrated as follows:

He had been a good husband till the day he abandoned me. He has always met the financial needs of the family in an effort to fulfill the basic needs of the family. Unlike many men, he is not alcoholic and smoker. But, what had been the source of our recurring quarrel and disagreement had been the fact that he did not provide the children with care and affection on regular basis. By that I mean he did not spend ample time with us thereby rendering the children the necessary care and affection. But as I had lost my parental care and affection, I know how painful it is growing up without ample parental care and affection. So, I do not want my daughters and a son to face the same agony I had grown up with. Other than this, he is literally flawless.

Like she once and again mentioned throughout her talks from the beginning to the end, from her perspective their separation is attributed to the obstinate repudiation of her husband to lavish their children with bountiful care and affection deemed important for the normal growth of the children. And she elaborated as:

He does not remain at home with us. He would rather waste his precious spare time by chilling out with his friends. Had he had spent his leisure time with me or our daughters; I would have gotten no moral audacity to blame him. So what is more convincing signal than this that he does not want to spend time with our children not due to lack of time but due to carelessness, disinterestedness and irresponsibility to do so. I again and again beseeched him from the bottom of my heart, but he turned deaf ear to my beseeching.

Bulcha on his part has his own reason for their separation. Unlike his wife, he does not believe that their daughters are the reason for their separation. He rather believes that unfaithfulness in their relationship is the major factor for the termination of their marriage. He says that she does not stay at home sometimes. She comes home after the middle of the night at 2:00 pm. He avers infidelity on part of his wife is the primary factor for their separation as to him.

The separation of the two couples has had a detrimental effect on their children especially the youngest daughter. According to her mother, Ayantu always nags her to bring her father back to home and start living together under one roof. She always tells her mother that she feels sorry for her father and longs for him on a regular basis. Ever since her father left home, her academic performance has deteriorated severely. Unusually, she has become thoughtful and scatterbrained. Likewise, Derartu and Lamessa could not stop quarrelling with their mother ever since their father left home. On top of that their academic performance too has degenerated severely.

Unwillingness of Chaltu for accommodation of change

Chaltu was brought up in a conservative family which was strict with the behaviour and actions of their children. Strange behaviour and outlandish wearing style had no place and, if it ever happened, was addressed with zero tolerance. Even though she is highly critical of some disciplinary rules of her orientation family, Chaltu hails as fabulous the anti-fashion and bizarre wearing style stance of her orientation family. Thus, she wants to apply that same old rule to her own family. But Derartu has vehemently denounced her mother's anti-fashion stance. This issue has been the major battlefield between Derartu and her mother. It is figured out that there is accommodating changes and compromises demands in the family. Put it another way, Chaltu is too conservative and Derartu is too progressive. These two highly polarized extremes should be negotiated and compromised to restore the disrupted equilibrium of the family.

Dysfunctional patterns of interaction

The interaction pattern between the spouses and between Derartu and her mother is quite dysfunctional. Chaltu tends to speak aggressively and dominantly which leaves the other members of the family offended and obliged them to resort to quarrel. Whenever Bulcha and Chaltu try to communicate their feelings, Chaltu dominantly and hotly embark on venting her feelings and views leaving no room for Bulcha. So, they often end up quarreling. Broadly speaking, the problem of the interaction pattern of the family is that it is devoid of listening to each other and taking turn to speak up dispassionately, respectfully and calmly. Thus, this dysfunctional part of the family's interaction pattern ought to be dealt with to help the family curtail the disequilibrium and restore its previous homeostasis.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

According to African strengths theory, resilience is an ability to withstand pressure against all odds (Africa Social Work Network, 2020). In addition, African family theory (sometimes called *ukama* theory) notes that individual, family includes immediate, extended and tribal relatives (Africa Social Work Network, 2020). The pillars of African family theory are (1) value for marriage; (2) value for child bearing; (3) value for bloodline and maintaining race-line; (4) value for extended family; (5) value for strengthening the bond between the families involved in the marriage; (6) value for a permanent home; (7) value for sharing or dividing family roles; (8) value for looking after one another and not putting individual needs first; (9) value for community; and (10) maintaining for African values (Africa Social Work Network, 2020). Each member of the family has roles in the family, extended family and community. Some of the roles include mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts and grandparents. If a member fails to play their role, the family, extended family or community will not function effectively. It attributes problems to dysfunctional family structures and the rigidity that results from these structures. Accordingly, Chaltu's family structure has been characterized by absence of negotiation, mutual support between Chaltu and her husband, between Chaltu and her elder daughter, and absence of emotional shelter between Chaltu and her husband. The boundary is rigid, and the communication pattern is pathological. Bulcha has not directly communicated with his wife. Chaltu's parenting style is a reflection of her childhood rearing style and she is demanding obedience from her children especially from her elder daughter. Chaltu has also blamed her daughter for the occurrence of separation in this family. The couple has not communicated their problem directly rather they left their own problem on the other side and blame their elder daughter. This resulted in conflictual relationship among family members.

The intervention will be directed to bring structural change and altering dysfunctional aspect of Chaltu's family. Regarding parental coalition, Bulcha and Chaltu should get help to complement each other in their roles as parents in order to be an effective parental subsystem and discharge their co-parenting responsibilities. Moreover, establishment of clear boundaries between all individuals and subsystems in the family should be set. Furthermore, aiding the children to become a subsystem of siblings, and increasing the frequency of interactions and nurturance, since the family is disengaged. Thus, the goal is to make the family more flexible in its patterns of interacting and responding. To achieve the goals, the following therapeutic techniques are applicable to Chaltu's family. In boundary making, boundary should be reset, and roles should be played by each member of the family. The elder daughter will be informed about her role as a child and expectation of parents from her. She should respect what her mother is saying in a manner that is not detrimental to her developmental need. The aim will also be avoiding the coalition between the elder daughter and her father thereby putting the elder daughter on her proper role position. In order to change this pattern, the father and mother must re-establish the boundary around their parental subsystem and this triangle should be de-triangulated.

CONCLUSION

The study noted the way family members are socialized and brought up from their childhood matters a lot in their later life. When family members are socialized in democratic family with adequate affection and love, their later life would be positively impacted, whereas when family members are brought up in conflictual and instable family, their later life would be negatively impacted. Resilience is vital for normalizing and harmonizing separated family members. Briefly, family assessment was undertaken to identify family problems and show how to bounce them back by considering their strengths, assets, resources and social capital.

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