

Conflict Resolution in the Families of Nine Ethnic Groups in Ethiopia

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Abstract: *The study makes a brief review of the literature on the concepts of ethnic groups, ethnicity, family and conflicts. Then it presents the method of data collection followed by the findings of the survey study, which involved the largest nine ethnic groups in Ethiopia. About 2,165 family heads (52.98% males and 47.02% females) of which the Amhara (373 subjects), Oromo (360), Tigraway (217), Guragie (177), Somale (206), Sidama (181), Wolaita (249), Hadiya (212) and Afar (190) ethnic groups participated in the study. A questionnaire consisting of items on various socio-economic issues was completed for each participant in 1995/96. Two of the main issues studied were causes of conflicts and methods of conflict resolution in the family. The results show that money and economic issues, misconduct of one of the partners and jealousy are the first, second and third ranked, respectively, causes of conflicts in families. Sexual incompatibility and financial problems are the main causes for conflicts between husbands and wives. However, some ethnic groups such as Tigraway, Amhara and Guragie considered marital infidelity and sexual incompatibility as the main causes of marital conflicts, while Oromo, Somale and Afar indicated that not bearing a child as the first ranked cause of conflict. Mediation and arbitration by a third party (elders, relatives, friends) and accommodating the disagreements and conflicts (living with it) are some of the main techniques of conflict resolution in most families. Corporal punishments (physical fights) have also been reported as techniques of resolving conflicts.*

Introduction

Ethiopia has a population of 61.67 million and about eighty ethnic groups (CSA, 1998). As could be observed from the Population and Housing Census of 1994, Oromo and Amhara are the largest ethnic groups with a population of 32.15% and 30.13% respectively (CSA, 1998). Tigraway, Guragie, Somale, Sidama, Wolaita, Hadiya, Afar,

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Agaw, Gamo, Gedeo, Kaffacho and Kambatta account for about 1 to 6% each of the total population of Ethiopia. These 14 ethnic groups account for about 94% of Ethiopia's population. The remaining large number of minority ethnic groups account for the remaining 6% of the population. [Please refer to the annex for the list of the major ethnic groups in Ethiopia].

The top nine ethnic groups (accounting for 88% of the population) were studied in 1995/96. The study covered various socio-economic issues focusing on gender dynamics (Hirut, Habtamu and Yusuf, 1997). One of the major themes was conflicts in families (causes, methods of conflict resolution, causes of divorce, punishment, etc.). Some 2,165 family heads completed a questionnaire prepared in the ethnic group's respective language (except Afar and Guragie which used Amharic). Of the total, 1,147 (52.98%) males and 1,018 (47.02%) females returned the questionnaire.

This is a report of the study concerning the theme at hand (family conflict and its resolution). In the next section of the report, it will briefly discuss issues related to ethnicity, families and conflicts which is mainly literature review focusing on definitions and explanations. The third section will be methodology followed by the findings section. Finally there will be a brief discussion and conclusion.

Literature Review

Concepts of ethnic group, ethnicity, family and conflict are very complex, elusive and often controversial. Each of these issues (concepts, variables) has vast literature, but no conclusive agreement on their definitions, scope and understanding. Since the study is on issues related to family conflicts, more attention will be given to the discussion of conflicts. We will limit ourselves to definitions and brief comments regarding ethnic group/ethnicity and family.

Spickard (1989:12) states that the *literature on ethnicity is voluminous, contradictory and not very precise* (p.12). The following are sample definitions and explanations of ethnic groups and ethnicity in general.

- An ethnic group is... a collective within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood (R. Schermerhorn, cited in Spickard, 1989:12).
- An ethnic group derives from distinct cultural patterns, languages, distribution of traits, and/or social organizations. That is, the marks of distinction are association with a particular historical entity and its components (Morrison, 1982:6).
- An ethnic group can be succinctly defined as any racial, religious, language, national origin, or regional category of subculturally distinct persons, regardless of the group's size (minority or majority), power (subordinate or dominant), or generational status (immigrant, native born, or indigenous) (Allen, 1983:6).
- Where people speak a common language, eat the same food, discipline their children in a similar way, and articulate the same values there is ethnicity (Spickard, 1989:12).
- Where a group identifies itself as an ethnic group, where it is so identified by its neighbours, where an individual identifies herself and is so identified –there is ethnicity (Spickard, 1989:14).
- Ethnicity was perhaps coined in scientific literature in 1950's... though known since ancient Greek-Ethnos (Group of people with shared characteristics) (Chapman, 1993: 6).
- Ethnicity can be thought as a sense of group identity deriving from real or perceived common bonds such as language, race, or religion (Edwards, 1985: 6).
- Ethnicity... is placing of people in groups or categories that are considered to be significantly distinct on the basis of selected perceived cultural or physical differences (Howard, 1989:272).

- The concept of ethnicity involves group boundaries, distinct cultural traits, different beliefs, values and patterns of behavior, ... self and other identification (Abaineh Workie, 1978:268).

All these and other definitions and explanations indicate that the concepts of ethnic group and ethnicity involve the following *criteria* (elements):

- A group of people (a social category);
- People of (claim of) similar (same) racial origin or heritage;
- Speaking the same language, though not always;
- Similar culture as reflected in child upbringing, values, customs, marriages, religion, etc.;
- Identity as reflected by the location of oneself to a given social (ethnic) group;
- Some overt and covert cultural behavioral patterns and social ties.

Based on the above definitions and explanations, we can define an ethnic group as a human collectivity within a larger society, having real or putative common ancestry, mostly speaking the same language, with similar culture as reflected by social values and child rearing practices, and with the association to a specific territory. Ethiopia has 80 ethnic groups which might fulfill the above definition (criteria). Ethiopia is a plural society with various groups of people, with their own languages, culture, heritage and also areas of settlement (to some extent). In today's Ethiopia, ethnicity (grouping people according to common characteristics) is an important issue due to regionalization and decentralization of power (FDRE, 1995).

As Allen (1983) has indicated, individuals belong to one or two or more ethnic groups by birth, personal identity, language, upbringing, and/or ascription of the society. They tend to reflect this in their typical behavioral pattern, values, child rearing practices and in various family matters.

The names of the ethnic groups involved in this study are the following and their population ratios appear in front of their names (CSA, 1998:66-67).

Oromo	-	32.15%
Amhara	-	30.13%
Tigraway	-	6.18%
Somale	-	5.95%
Guragie	-	4.31%
Sidama	-	3.47%
Wolaita	-	2.39%
Afar	-	1.84%
Hadiya	-	1.75%

Next, we will briefly look at the definitions and explanations of what a family is.

Well accepted and most common definition of a family is that it is a *kinship group consisting of at least one married couple sharing the same residence with their children and performing sexual, reproductive, economic, and educational functions* (Spradley and McCurdy, 1980, p.93). A family is a group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood, or adoption and constitutes a household with some interaction among the members. Usually, a family is a kinship group that rears children and has a husband, wife, children and relatives.

The USA Census Bureau defines a family as *a group of two or more persons who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption and residing together* (Cited in Duvall and Miller, 1985:7).

All societies and states are expected to protect the family. Some of the main functions of the family include (Duvall and Miller, 1985; Spradely and McCurdy, 1980; Horton and Hunt, 1976; Clayton, 1979) that it:

- Produces children (continuity of genes);
- Socializes/raises children into adults;
- Regulates the satisfaction of sexual desires;

- Provides affection, love, companionship and emotional support;
- Provides status and roles to its members;
- Protects its members from physical, social, psychological and economic harm;
- Cares for the weak, ill and the aged;
- Serves as the basic economic unit, in which members work together as a team and jointly share from the produce.

Despite all these *good functions* of the family, conflicts, separations, divorces and violence are recurrent features through out the world (UN, 1980;1995). Though a *household* does not exactly mean a family, there were 11.1 million households in Ethiopia in 1994, with an average of 4.7 persons per household (CSA, 1996). It is a large number to be concerned about. Any effort to understand the situation of the Ethiopian family is to be encouraged. No doubt that positive relationships and happiness in the family contribute towards the healthy development (at least psychologically) of the members.

Conflict is the main issue of the study and hence we will discuss it in more detail than the concepts of family and ethnic group.

Conflict is defined as *a social situation in which incompatible goals and activities occur between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who hold antagonistic feelings toward each other and attempt to control each other* (Fisher, 1982:567). As Coser (1967), Schelling (1960), Mitchell (1968) and Fisher (1982) indicate, conflicts arise in general due to competition, to control the limited resources, misperceptions, miscommunications and objective differences in personality and other characteristics.

The traditional view is that conflict is bad and avoidable. People who cause conflict are considered as deviants and troublemakers. It (conflict) is considered as evil, it should be avoided, or even be hidden.

Often we hear people boast about how well everyone gets along in their family or office. Some times we are told that their group members never argue, never have conflicts and that everyone gets along very

well. Social experience and dozens of studies in the world tell us that a conflictless and a problem-free group is hard to find among people (e.g. Fisher, 1982; Myers and Myers, 1985). Normally people have some instincts, self-interest, values, commitments, orientations, misperceptions and individual differences. Hence, the possibilities for conflicts are very high in a normal social life.

The potential negative effects of conflicts are real. They include from simple irritation, anger and arguments to aggression, violence and wars depending on the social units involved. Divorce, family violence, physical fights and beatings, psychological withdrawal and embattled relationships are some of the consequences of interpersonal and family conflicts. These problems do exist in Ethiopia (Habtamu, 1996). Korten (1972) and Habtamu (1994) have reported that authoritarianism, low tolerance for differences of opinion, passing problems to others, mistrust in interpersonal relations, aggression and revengefulness are some of the major values (characteristics) of the dominant culture of Ethiopia. The contributions of these values towards conflicts would be immense.

Because of differences in personality, needs, feelings, motives and values between the husband and the wife, an ordinary family will have some conflicts. Often, constant bickering and arguments tend to wear people out, decrease their general motivation, consume energy and resources and create hostility between the parties involved. Let alone conflicts, some studies indicate that *fear of having conflict* leads to conservatism, conformity, withholding of information, and pretensions (e.g., Myers and Myers, 1985).

The recent trend is that a conflict is inevitable and potentially good. Some conflicts can be functional and helpful and may spur growth and positive changes. Tensions and conflicts often give people more energy and motivation. Conflicts tend to mobilize energies to win, or they lead to innovation, creativity and change. New ideas often come out of conflicting view points, which are openly shared and discussed. Open disagreements may lead to useful exploration of feelings, values, attitudes, perceptions, outlooks and ways of sharing (handling) the limited resources. Consequently, the important issue in

family and other interpersonal relationships is how the conflict is handled (resolved).

Katz (1965), Coser (1967), Fisher (1982) and other researchers report that resolving conflicts effectively is one of the hardest works in all human relations. These and other authorities indicate that withdrawing (avoiding, retreating or remaining silent), smoothing (accommodating, playing down differences, emphasizing commonalities), compromising (accepting, splitting of the differences through third party mediation), forcing (antagonistic competition), and problem solving (confrontation and dealing with the issue and the differences) are the main strategies (methods) used in conflicts' resolution. The most effective and psychologically satisfactory method is where differences are worked out to a mutually acceptable and optimal solution. This strategy is often labeled by social psychologists as a *win-win* approach - since none of the parties loose, but are satisfied with the solution.

These methods of conflict resolution are used in settling various disputes and conflicts between and among families in Ethiopia. Perhaps, various factors such as ethnicity, religion, education level, culture and other variables will play some role on the strategy a family/community uses to resolve conflicts. There is no doubt that conflicts exist in Ethiopian families of any ethnic group. As a matter of fact, some preliminary observations show that due to long years of war, drought and famine, displacement, and severe poverty, family disruption and divorce/separation might have increased (e.g. Hirut, 1996; Habtamu, 1996). Crude estimates are that over 10% of the marriages end up in divorce and separation (estimated average from CSA, 1996) and about 30% of the households/families are being headed by females (Zenebework, 1997). Hence the study of conflicts within families in a multiethnic country like Ethiopia would be a contribution toward the understanding of the problems of the basic social unit of societies.

Objectives and Significance of the Study

The main objectives of the national study involving the nine major ethnic groups in Ethiopia are the following:

- a) To find out and discuss the main causes of conflicts in the families of nine ethnic groups in Ethiopia;
- b) To identify the main causes of divorce among the major ethnic groups;
- c) To find out and explain the methods of conflict resolution within the families of major ethnic groups; and
- d) To indicate the similarities and differences between the major ethnic groups in the causes of conflicts and methods of conflicts resolution.

The study is the first of its kind in Ethiopia. The author is not aware of any study on the issue involving such a large number of ethnic groups. Assefa (1995) states that studies and discussions concerning ethnicity are *considered as destructive* in Ethiopia. He further states *some (intellectuals) pretended as if the differences did not exist. Others kept silent because they did not want to suffer the unbearable consequences of treating this delicate issue* (1995:xvi). The bibliography on Eritreo-Ethiopian studies compiled by 'Abbink (1996) also shows that ethnicity is one of the least studied themes. Though some attempts have been made (recently) to study various ethnic groups, particularly the minorities (e.g., Ayalew, 1993; Gebre, 1993; Haileyesus, 1996; Lakew, 1998; Data, 1997) Ethiopia is a country where even the exact number of different languages spoken, or the names and the characteristics of the ethnic groups are not adequately known.

In addition to the issue of ethnicity, issues of conflicts are also delicate and usually shied away and suppressed. Issues of ethnicity, families and conflicts are very crucial for the smooth functioning of families and of societies. The following are the main socio-economic values of this study.

- a) No major study has been made concerning conflicts in Ethiopian families;
- b) No comparative and cross-cultural study of such a magnitude has been done regarding conflicts and related issues in families;
- c) The finding will hopefully assist in the understanding of the similarities and differences (regarding the issues at hand among the main ethnic groups in Ethiopia;

- d) It would be a contribution towards policy-decision making and legislation regarding conflicts' resolution in families; and
- e) The finding will serve as a basis for more rigorous and controlled studies on these nationally important issues.

Methodology

Participants

The participants of this study are the main ethnic groups' members who are the heads of families and residing either in the capital city or an important town of the region and/or zone and their vicinities (50 km diameter).

Table 1: Ethnic Groups, Sites and Number of Participants by Sex

Ethnic Groups and Sites*	Male	Female	Total
Tigraway (Mekele)	112	105	217
Afar (Asaita)	124	66	190
Amhara (D.Birhan,Dessie and Bahirdar)	185	188	373
Oromo (Nekemte, Assela & Nazreth)	176	184	360
Somale (Jijiga)	121	85	206
Guragie (Wolkitie)	81	96	177
Sidama (Awassa)	107	74	181
Wolaita (W.Soddo)	111	138	249
Hadiya (Hossana)	130	82	212
Total Subjects	1,147	1,018	2,165
Percentage (M-F)	52.98	47.02	100

* The towns and their vicinities.

The subjects were selected using stratified random sampling and also available sampling techniques. The administration and/or Kebeles of each urban area and its vicinity peasants' associations (rural areas) co-operated in the selection of the subjects. The kebeles provided the list of houses and household heads. The relevant (selected) persons were approached and interviewed. The number of participants of each ethnic group and the study sites are given in Table 1. The largest number of participants are from the Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups. It was planned to interview 350 to 400 participants for these major

ethnic groups and 200 to 250 for the others. Because of the large size and possible cultural diversity of various zones, it was decided to interview family heads from three different areas each, for the Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups.

The youngest participant was 17 while the oldest was 90 years old. The average age of the participants of the total sample was 35.33 years.

The Instrument

A questionnaire consisting of various socio-economic issues (questions) was prepared in Amharic. Demographic information and issues related to conflicts were some of the items. The questionnaire was translated into Oromigna, Tigrigna, Somaligna, Wolaitigna and Hadiyigna languages and pilot-tested on at least 10 subjects (for each group) in Addis Ababa. The translators were fluent speakers of the respective languages and involved in research, teaching and/or curriculum work at the AAU, the Ministry of Education or high schools.

The Procedure

A questionnaire was completed for each participant by the researcher or the research assistants. The research assistants were from the respective ethnic group area that spoke the language fluently. They were trained in collecting data, interviewing, questionnaire completion, data coding, etc.

With the assistance of the *kebele* offices (in the case of urban subjects) and peasant associations (in the case of rural subjects) households and their heads were identified, approached and interviewed. Attempts were made to use stratified random sampling method. However, when the randomly selected household heads were not present, any available adult in the neighborhood, usually in the next household and fulfilling the criteria (belonging to the ethnic group as reported by the subject, speaking the language, and being the head of the family) was interviewed. Each subject was interviewed separately in his/her home, *kebele* office, under a tree, just sitting

outside on the field, etc. We assume the participants responded to our questions frankly.

Findings

Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data were made. The results are presented in percentages, means, standard deviations and Pearson-product moment correlation. First, the major causes of conflicts in families at the national (all subjects) and at ethnic groups' levels are reported. This part is also includes the reported causes for divorce. Second, the methods used to resolve conflicts are presented.

Causes of Conflicts

Three major questions were posed to the participants regarding the main causes of conflict in their family, usual causes of conflicts between husbands and wives, and main causes of divorce in the community at large.

The main causes of conflicts within families at national level are money and other economic issues (48.2%), misbehavior of a partner (29%) and jealousy (13.3%).

Though the magnitude is not large, the roles played by lack of communication, interference of in-laws and relatives in causing family conflicts are also to be noted.

Analyses of data were made to check if there were differences between males and females, urban and rural residents, and various religious groups. Major differences were not noticed between the men and women in most of the causes reported. But a large number of women (61.5%) compared to the men (38.5%) indicated that the interference of the in-laws was a major cause for family conflicts. No

major differences were observed between rural and urban residents, and between persons of different religious denominations (Orthodox Christian, Protestant, Catholic, Moslem and others).

Table 2. Main Causes of Conflicts within Families by Ethnic Groups

Ethnic Group	First Ranked Cause (%)*	Second Ranked Cause (%)*	Third Ranked Cause (%)*
Tigraway	Money & Econ Issues (79.3)	Misbehavior of partner (67.3)	Jealousy (33.2)
Afar	Misbehavior of partner (31.1)	Money & Econ Issue (27.6)	Jealousy (26.8)
Amhara	Money & Econ Issues (50.9)	Jealousy (33.7)	Misbehavior (24.9)
Oromo	Money & Econ Issues (63.3)	Misbehavior of partner (31.1)	Jealousy (13.6)
Somale	Money & Econ IssueS (50)	Misbehavior of partner (33.5)	Jealousy (20.4)
Guragie	Money & Econ Issues (74)	Misbehavior of partner (34.5)	Lack of com. (13.6)
Sidama	Money & Econ Issues (34.8)	Misbehavior of partner (24.9)	Lack of com. (18.8)
Wolaita	Misbehavior of partner (49.4)	Money & Econ Issue (25.7)	Gossips & rumours (10.4)
Hadiya	Money & Econ Issues (36.3)	Misbehavior of partner (18.4)	Jealousy (17.9)
Total*	Money & Econ Issues (48.2)	Misbehavior of partner (29)	Jealousy (13.3)

*It is to be noted that the percentages do not add up to 100, since each participant could list several causes. Also, a participants' first cause could be the second or the third cause for another. "Econ" means economic (material, property); "com." means communication (discussion, talking to each other).

The common causes of conflicts/disputes between the husband and wife are sexual incompatibility (23.5%) and financial issues (21.7%) as indicated in Table 3. Marital infidelity and not bearing children are also major causes of conflicts between husbands and wives in general.

Table 3: Main Causes of Conflicts Between Married Couples by Ethnic Groups

Ethnic Group	First Ranked Cause (%)*	Second Ranked Cause (%)*
Tigraway	Not bearing children (27.2)	Financial Issues (23)
Afar	Sexual Incompatibility (31.6)	Male or Female Chauvinism (13.7)
Amhara	Financial Issues (33.5)	Sexual Incompatibility (21.7)
Oromo	Sexual Incompatibility (25)	Marital Infidelity (21.1)
Somale	Financial Issues (41.3)	Interference of extended family members (23.3)
Guragie	Financial Issues (55.4)	Not bearing children (22)
Sidama	Marital Infidelity (44.8)	Financial Issues (29.3)
Wolaita	Sexual Incompatibility (34.1)	Not bearing children (32.9)
Hadiya	Marital Infidelity (34.1)	Not bearing children (33)
Total	Sexual Incompatibility (23.5)	Financial Issues (21.7)

* Note that the percentages do not add up to 100, since each subject lists his/her own first or second cause of conflicts. The ranking is based on the total number of responses of each group.

Major differences were not observed in the main causes of conflicts between couples as listed by the rural and urban residents, various religious groups, and men and women. The small differences between the sexes are presented in Table 4. None of the differences is significant.

Table 4: Main Causes of Conflicts Between Married Couples by Sex

Causes*	Males (%)	Females (%)	Both (%)
Sexual incompatibility	22.5	24.8	23.5
Not bearing children (being barren)	12.9	12	12.5
Marital infidelity (adultery)	18.7	18.8	18.8
Financial issues	20.5	22.9	21.7
Health problems	3.1	3.9	3.5
Interference of extended family members	3.8	3.6	3.7
Males or Females' chauvinism	7.2	6.6	7.0
Work related pressures and problems	1.1	0.8	0.9
Cultural & ethnic problems	1.4	0.6	1.1
Other causes	8.9	6.0	7.6
Total (M.F)	52.6	47.4	100

* Only first ranked causes are listed.

Causes of Divorce

The participants were asked to list the *main causes for divorce in your community*. Since it is a broad, subjective and open-ended question, the participants listed a number of causes for divorce. The research assistants compiled the lists for each ethnic group. The list contained 19 different causes in the case of Somale, 45 causes in the case of Amhara and 47 causes in the case of Oromo. The remaining six lists contained 20 to 38 reasons. The main (perceived) common causes for divorce through out the country are the following.

- Poverty, lack of property and income
- Jealousy
- Not bearing children (being barren)
- Sexual incompatibility
- Interference of in-laws and relatives

- Gossips and rumours about the partners
- Extramarital sexual affairs (adultery)
- Lack of communication and open discussion
- Not getting along with each other
- Regular arguments, fighting and beating
- Mismanagement of financial and material resources by a partner
- When the partners do not love each other any more
- If a partner has poor health/chronic illness
- If the wife does not have the skills to run (manage) the home
- When the wife is *talkative and insulting*.

To be included in the above list, each cause had to be mentioned by the members of at least six different ethnic groups. One can easily note that there are large commonalities/similarities between the main ethnic groups on the causes for divorce. All the lists are not reproduced here due to space limitations.

Methods of Conflict Resolution

The next important issue addressed was the methods used to resolve various conflicts in family settings. The following were some of the methods listed by most participants:

- Elders (*sheemagilie*) mediating between the family members
- The fathers or friends of the couples mediating
- Discussing and working out the differences within the family
- Punishing (beating) the other partner-usually the wife
- Going/Reporting to authorities such as the *kebeles*, the police or the court
- Making them swear (in the name of God or Saint) that they have not done/will not do the claimed activity.
- Just accept the claimed faults and live with it
- Leave/run away from the situation or the relationship
- Get angry and show it to the other partner
- Divorce and separation

The writer has noticed that almost in all the ethnic groups studied, the effort is to keep the family together and the heavy sacrifice paid is usually by the wives. It is the women who are expected to tolerate the beatings, to remain silent, manage the family with the minimum resources available and raise the children.

Table 5: Estimated Average Number of Beatings/Hittings in a Family in Six Months by Ethnic Group

Ethnic Group	Husband on Wife	Wife on Husband
Tigraway	4.58	0.51
Afar	8.28	2.19
Amhara	6.40	0.55
Oromo	9.39	1.24
Somale	2.41	0.23
Guragie	6.36	0.61
Sidama	3.17	0.99
Wolaita	4.61	1.28
Hadiya	6.93	4.60
Total	6.90*	1.09*

* Standard deviations of 23.07 and 10.70 respectively (left to right).

Two questions were posed to the respondents regarding beating/hitting of the partners. As could be observed from Table 5, on the average husbands hit their wives once in a month while wives do it only once in six months. This is only a crude estimate, but it still indicates that physical punishment and violence are practiced in the Ethiopian family and the society at large. Pearson product moment correlation was done on wife and child beating and the correlation was statistically significant ($r=0.3283, p<0.01$, two tailed test). It indicates that those who beat their wives also beat their children.

The writer recalls of a story told in one of the study sites regarding a physical fight between a married couple. Neighbors heard of some screaming and noise next door and went running to the couples' house to stop the fighting. It was the wife who was beating the husband before the neighbors approached their house. But when the neighbors arrived, the wife put the husband on top of her and started

screaming to make it appear to the guests that it was the husband who was winning. This partly indicates that physical fighting is *acceptable* and it is the man who has to do it and win! The husband should rather be a *strong* one!

Table 6: Source of Advice on Serious Matters by Sex

Source	Males (%)	Females (%)	Both (%)
Older Men	54.2	50.1	52.2
Older Women	2.0	5.1	3.5
Friends	17.2	16.9	17.1
Marriage Partner	20.5	21.2	20.0
No one	0.9	1.4	1.1
Others	5.2	5.3	2.4
Total	52.6	47.4	100

Another question posed to the participants was *who they go to for advice on important matters*. 52.2% of the subjects reported that they go to the older men while only 3.5% go to older women (Table 6). It is interesting to note that there is no significant difference between men and women on the selection of *advisors*. Both select the men.

Brief Discussion and Conclusion

Peoples' social life is characterized by collaborations and conflicts. Common goals and interests, open discussions, predictable behavior and commitments to the family tend to lead towards collaboration, while behavior directed to own goals and interests, lack of resources, threats and unpredictable behaviors lead to conflicts. Both collaboration (affection, love, care, responsibility) and conflicts exist in Ethiopian families.

The increase in the number of prostitutes, divorces, street children and the deterioration of living conditions in the past two to three decades indicate that conflicts in the family are also increasing. Ethiopia has about 80 ethnic groups, which have been living under the same political systems for several decades. Hence it was expected that the ethnic groups will have major similarities and some differences on issues related to conflicts in families. Sharing of resources, incompatibility of need and interests, misperceptions and

miscommunication, and differences in values are the main causes of conflict. These are similar to the causes reported by Katz (1965) and Fisher (1982).

Leslie and Leslie (1980) reported that mental cruelty, neglect of home and children, financial problems, physical abuse, drinking alcohol, infidelity, verbal abuse, lack of love, and sexual incompatibility are the main causes of divorce in Western societies. Habtamu (1999, citing Aklilu W.Amanuel; J.H.Beckstrom, MOLSA, Original W.Geogis and Swedish Radda Barnen's studies) reported that the major causes of conflicts in families and for divorce in Ethiopia in general include: misuse of family income, inability to support the family, committing adultery, being sterile, not getting along, jealousy, sexual incompatibility, interference of in-laws and relatives, rumors and gossips, and lack of love between the partners. Tassew (1998:129) has also reported that the main causes for marital conflict and divorce among Orthodox Christians in Addis Ababa were husbands' failure to provide materially to the household, wife beating and forcing to leave the home, property related disputes, drunkenness and adultery (p.129).

The Ethiopian Civil Code (Ethiopian Government, 1960) stipulates that the spouses have to go to *sheemagilies* (elders) to settle their disputes. In a country where about 60% of the population is illiterate, 85% is rural, access to courts or marriage counseling is limited, the arbitration by elders is very important. It is a traditional institution that needs some changes, improvement and strengthening.

Concerning the methods of conflict resolution, it seems that problem solving approach where both parties *win* is not regularly applied. Often the wives are made to capitulate (or they do it themselves)-this is what is termed as *win-loose* situation in social psychology literature (e.g. Fisher, 1982). Usually arbitration (mediation) involves consultation, gathering of facts and opinions, discussions, reaching to some compromise and setting some conditions (limitations) on the parties involved. In the overwhelming majority or all of the cases, the members of the *elders committee* would be males and hence the chances to favor the husbands would be very high. Up to date legislation such as family law and practices that accommodate the

traditional methods of conflict resolution, and the respect for equal and fair human rights (e.g., UN, 1948; FDRE, 1995) are over due.

The roles that the elders play in all the ethnic groups in resolving conflicts are vast. Hence this broad based institution of arbitration need to be improved (strengthened) in line with the socio-economic development of the country and respecting equal rights of men and women.

Finally the author would like to underscore that issues of ethnicity, families and conflicts need several rigorous studies. Knowing the cultural bases would help in various policy decision-makings and further legislation.

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Annex : Population of Ethiopia by Ethnic Group, 1994 (Those above 100,000)

Ethnic Group	Population size	% of Total
Affar	979,367	1.84
Agew (Awingi & Kamyir)	555,722	1.05
Amhara	16,007,933	30.13
Ari	155,002	0.29
Bench	173,125	0.33
Gedeo	639,905	1.20
Gumuz	121,487	0.23
Guragie	2,290,274	4.31
Hadiya	927,933	1.75
Jebelawi	118,530	0.22
Kaffacho	599,188	1.13
Kemant	172,327	0.32
Kembatta	499,825	0.94
▪ Alaba	125,900	0.24
Konso	153,419	0.29
Koyra	107,595	0.20
Oromo	17,080,318	32.15
Sidama	1,842,314	3.47
Somale	3,160,540	5.95
Tigraway	3,284,568	6.18
Wolaita	1,269,216	2.39
▪ Gamo	719,847	1.36
▪ Goffa	241,530	0.46
▪ Kulo/Dawro	331,483	0.62
Yemsa	165,184	0.31
Other Groups	1,413,318	2.66
Foreigners	105,000	0.20
Not Stated	5,827	0.01
Total (80)	53,132,276	100

Source: CSA (1998). *The 1994 Pop. & Housing Census: Country Level*, p. 66-67.

The current estimates of each ethnic group can be obtained by multiplying 1994 size by 1.16, since CSA projected that Ethiopian population will be 61.67 million in 1999.