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### **Biyyaa Baanus Biyyi Nu Keessaa Hinbaatu: Changing Gender Norms and Traditional Mediation Impacts on Marriage Among Ethiopian Immigrants in Three Southwestern Ontario Cities**

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**Biyyaa Baanus Biyyi Nu Keessaa Hinbaatu: Changing Gender Norms and Traditional  
Mediation Impacts on Marriage Among Ethiopian Immigrants in Three Southwestern  
Ontario Cities**

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
Master of Social Work Wilfrid Laurier University

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## **Abstract**

Immigrant spouses face culture shock in the host countries because they are disconnected from their social fabric and, at the same time, must adhere to the host countries' lifestyles. One of the immigrants' spouses' challenges is the marital conflicts that arise because of changing gender norms in the host countries and the absence of family support to solve their conflicts. The purpose of this study is to examine changing gender norms and traditional mediation's impact on marriage among Ethiopian immigrants living in Kitchener, Waterloo and Guelph. The study asks overarching research question: *what is the impact of changing gender norms and traditional mediation on marriage among Ethiopian immigrants?*

The study was guided by a constructionist epistemology to understand participants' beliefs and patterns of changing norms and traditional mediation's impact on marriage. A qualitative design and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from five married and divorced male and female participants. Thematic analysis was used to identify and analyze themes and patterns of changes.

Findings highlight that marital relationship can be under constant tension with changes in gender norms. However, culturally constructed male-dominant norms can prevent men from acknowledging and adapting to changes. Couples also seek traditional mediation to ease the strain caused by shifting power in relationships. This study discusses implications for social work practice.

*Key Words: Changing gender norms, traditional family mediations, immigrant male dominance gender norms, women empowerment, marital conflicts.*

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First and foremost, I would like to thank Almighty God for giving me all the strength and opportunities to conduct this study on the challenges of my ethno-cultural community.

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### **Dedications**

A special dedication to my dad; I miss you so much. But I know you are always with me in spirit through ups and downs.

To my mother, Sidisu: You raised us as a single mom. You have taught me the most important lessons: strength, dedication, commitment, and not to give up in life. Thank you so much.

To all females in the world who have been abused and oppressed by their spouses and partners.

### **Definition of Terms**

- **Marriage** – refers to a marital relationship between heterosexual couples.
- **Gender norms change** – refers to the attitude and behaviours of women's participation in outside paid jobs and men's involvement in doing household chores.
- **Jarsummaa/traditional mediation** – a cultural mediation practice where influential community leaders/respected elders and religious leaders participate in helping couples to solve their marital conflicts.
- **Manguddoos/elders** – respected community leaders that led the *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation practices.
- **Mainstream service providers:** government agencies that provide service to the immigrants' spouses during marital conflict, including police officers, courts, housing agencies, and immigrant caseworkers.

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## **CHAPTER – ONE: INTRODUCCION**

### **1.1. Background**

Migration is one of the demographic factors that influence marital relationships due to the ideas and changes in lifestyle between countries of origin and destinations (Caarls and Mazzucato, 2016). Migrant spouses from third-world countries to developed countries can experience multiple challenges from arriving to understanding the new lifestyle, from adhering to the fabric and customs to assimilation and acculturation of the host countries' norms (Phelan et al., 2019). One of the apparent differences in living style is the change in gender roles on employment and sharing household chores responsibility between spouses which may impact marital relationships (Ogletree, 2015). According to Torosyan et al., (2016), migration can re-shape gender norms and relationships because of different ideas and expectations about gender roles and specific behaviours in host countries compared to their country of origin. Such variations and changing gender norms can cause marital conflicts, create family instability, and increase the risks for divorce among immigrants (Andersson et al., 2015).

Canada is considered the number one country of destination globally for quite a large number of immigrants from both developed and underdeveloped countries every year. The number of immigrants in Canada has been increasing steadily since the 1980s. The Ministry of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada 2019 report shows that over 321,000 people were offered permanent resident cards in Canada in 2018 (IRCC, 2019, p., 6). However, immigrants from different socio-cultural backgrounds experience problems integrating and adapting to Canadian cultural values and norms. One of the challenges newcomers could encounter are problems related to gender roles change and the absence of a social support system that might cause conflicts between spouses. Marta and Alfieri (2014) claimed that changing gender norms

is one factor that triggers conflicts and creates marital instability. Pessin and Arpino (2017) also point out that changes associated with the gender roles of couples are among the challenges immigrant families sometimes face in the host country.

Therefore, many immigrant couples face problems of maintaining relationships, including marital relationships, due to gender norms change and absence of extended family social support systems in the host countries. Studies have revealed that family instability is more frequent among immigrants than non-immigrants people. Furtado et al. (2013) illustrate that an immigrant from Germany, Italy, and Russia to the US indicated a significant percentage increase in family instability and divorce than non-immigrant residents. The cause of divorce is not studied, although there is an assumption that it might be related to cultural differences between the country of origin and the country of destination.

The factors that lead to marital conflict and divorce have changed in response to the changes in social, economic, and cultural factors to which immigrants are exposed. Immigrants are often confronted with conflicting socio-cultural changes where the attitude and practices of men and women in the host society can create family conflict for couples (Andersson et al., 2015). According to Phelan et al. (2019), immigrants from developing countries to the USA are often influenced by their home countries' cultural backgrounds and gender norms. The potential effect of migration on gender relations is that migration often emancipates women from patriarchal attitudes and practices. Migrant receiving countries provide women more access to jobs and income (Caarls and Mazzucato, 2016), reduce their dependency on men and enhance their bargaining power (Ogletree, 2015) and offer more protections for women (Torosyan et al., 2016)).

Thus, migration provides women more protection and freedom to exercise their rights than developing countries. For example, Andersson et al. (2015) noted that immigrant women in

Sweden have better protections and explicitly promote gender equality than in countries of origin. In addition, Hyman et al. (2008) indicated that gender norms change has a cumulative effect of women empowerment and women's legal protections to exercise their rights. Such women empowerment increases women's involvement in paid jobs outside of the home among immigrant communities. However, at the same time, it increases women's dual responsibilities at home and outside work when their husbands might not share house chores responsibilities (Torosyan et al., 2016). Thus, it creates marital conflicts between immigrant spouses who hold traditional gender norms. Marks et al. (2009) indicated that couples with gendered responsibility-sharing like "men breadwinner women homemaker" stereotype work division show high marital tensions and conflicts (p., 25).

In some countries like Ethiopia, when marital conflict happens, there is traditional mediation in the presence of extended family that provides support to solve their problems. For example, Sisay (2015) explains that family mediation led by a close relative of spouses and influential community leaders/respected elders and religious leaders support couples to solve their problems in Ethiopia. The primary purpose of traditional mediation is to address the cause of conflicts in the presence of respected and honored family members, avoid misconceptions and restore peace between couples. However, that sort of support system might not exist in Canada because the spouses are immigrants and have no extended family social support base.

Gender norms change due to women's protection and empowerment increases women's participation in paid jobs, consequently, increase the probability of marital conflicts among immigrants that hold traditional norms. On the other hand, the absence of an extended family support system like traditional family mediation during marital conflicts might impact marriage among Ethiopian immigrants. Overall, little research has been conducted on changing gender roles

and traditional mediation's impact on marriage among Canadian immigrants. Therefore, this study explored the impact of gender norms changes and traditional mediation on marriage among Ethiopian immigrants living in Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph cities of Ontario.

### **1.2. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine changing gender norms and traditional mediation impacts on marriage among Ethiopian immigrants living in three Southwestern Ontario cities.

The study objectives are

1. To explore the impact of changing gender norms in the marital relationships
2. To examine the effect of traditional family conflict mediation on marriages
3. To understand women's access to rights and protection on marriage among Ethiopian immigrants.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

The research addresses the following specific questions.

1. How do gender norms changes impact marriage?
2. What is the impact of traditional mediation on marital relationships?
3. What is the impact of women's protection and access to legal service providers on marriage among Ethiopian immigrants living in Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph?

### **1.4. Where I Began**

It was November 19, 2020, around 2:30 am on Thursday morning. I had a habit of waking up after 2:00 am when I was a student. Usually, I sleep around 9:00 pm or 9:30 pm and wake up around 2:00 am in the morning. After that, I am so fresh and very effective in reading and doing an assignment up to 5:30 am. Then I sleep again for one and a half hours and wake up around 7:30.

That is it for the day. When I tell my friends I wake up at 2:00 am, they are always surprised because my best study time is their amazing sleeping time.

We had a serious debate in the Social Justice Transformation (SK507) class on November 18/2020. Our professor was very motivated and engaging. I remember the topic we debated was on patriarchy and social justice. My white colleagues related patriarchy only with a white man and colonization. I raised my hand to explain that black men are also patriarchal because most African men oppress their wives. It was a very tense discussion. The day's discussion ended with the understanding that patriarchy is not only referring to men or colonialism. Instead, it is a system and a power control mechanism that adversely affects marginalized groups in society, particularly women. That time was about one month from the end of my MSW first term. We had lots of assignments, both group and individual. It was a tense time. So, I woke up at 2:30 am as usual.

I did not have time to watch the news. However, I receive daily information on Ethiopia's political situation and the war between the Tigray Regional administration and the Ethiopian Federal government that broke out on November 3, 2020. Almost all world news outlets and social media have reported about Ethiopia's civil war every day at that time. I had just logged in to Facebook on November 19/2020 and was shocked by what I saw. My Facebook friend posted a picture of a woman I had known in Toronto for nearly two years with the caption, "I cannot believe this happened to you; rest in peace, Obsekoo/Obse (the name of the victim is changed)." I was shocked and really shivering. I could not call anyone at that time. I was neither able to study nor do an assignment. How can I be focused and write even a sentence? I went back to my bed. I turned off my room light, but I was not able to sleep.

I met Obse Bikila in July 2017 when I came to Canada. I had been in a shelter house to apply for my asylum. She worked at a restaurant next to my shelter house at that time, and I

frequently visited that restaurant to meet my fellow Ethiopians. I heard she had been working in the same restaurant when she was stabbed to death by a man who, I was told, was her boyfriend. I had been in that shelter for about three months before finishing my refugee hearing, and I moved after that. I had seen Obse many times. She was a polite, humorous, and strong woman as far as I knew. She told me her hearing day was changed to an unknown date, so she decided to continue working in that restaurant. I never met the man who was her boyfriend. I moved from Toronto to Kitchener in September 2019 to apply to Wilfrid Laurier University to pursue an MSW education. I did not see Obse after I said goodbye to all my Toronto friends when I moved to Kitchener. I did not hear she finished her hearing. But I heard she was killed. On November 19/2020, around 8:30, I called her friends and the restaurant owner to get more information about the incident. They said Obse and the person who stabbed her to death were in a relationship for more than two years. Also, I heard they had been repeatedly in conflict, and the big issue was her job. I heard that the man did not want Obse to work in that restaurant. He wanted Obse to quit her job. Other than that, I found detailed news about the murder from Globalnews.ca posted on November 19, 2020, at 11:50 am, and CityNews Toronto posted on November 19, 2020, at 1:45 pm.

I was in disbelief. It took me long hours to process why that happened to Obse. Then, I shared this information with my colleagues in the Research class (SK-504). I could not forget it the whole day. I remembered that 12 months before Obse was murdered, on November 15, 2019, an Ethiopian woman called Lensa Gemechu (the name is changed) was killed in an apparent murder-suicide by an Ethiopian man in Toronto (Globalnews.ca November 15, 2019, 9:25 pm). A police report revealed a man called Chala (the name is changed) strangled a girl of 22 years old and slashed his own throat.

The police report also indicated that Lensa Gemechu had an affair with her murderer, although her boyfriend was her killer's roommate. After the incident, her boyfriend, called Ebba (the name is changed), reported that the murderer blackmailed Lensa. He reported that Lensa told him his roommate threatened to kill her if she ended the affair with him. He said he had learned three days before Lensa was killed that his roommate had an affair with her. Ironically, he did not report that his roommate threatened his girlfriend with death.

In 2020, I have learned that two Ethiopian women were killed in less than 12 months only in Toronto. One can only imagine how many may have endured the same fate in Canada, in USA, or in Europe? I do not know why Ethiopian men continue taking the lives of Ethiopian women. I used to work with women and for women in various human rights-based programs, and I knew Ethiopian women have been suffering in Ethiopia. I worked for International Non-government Organizations and UN Agencies back home for 14years, mainly on the protection of children, protection of women, and women empowerment programs and projects. I had seen my Ethiopian mothers, sisters, and daughters suffer in the hands of their husbands and boyfriends. I have celebrated many International Women's days on March 8 with amazing slogans and mottos that amplify Ethiopian women's oppression and advocate for women's rights. But the problems were still there the next day after the slogans were taken off billboards.

I learned that it was not unusual for Ethiopian women to be killed by their boyfriends or husbands in Ethiopia before I came to Canada. I remembered my cousin, Baredu Ifa (the name is changed), a mother of two children, was killed by her husband in her veterinary store in 2011. Baredu was my cousin and neighbor. We studied together in the same school from elementary to high school. Then, she joined a college and graduated with veterinary science. I heard the cause of their conflict between Baredu and her husband was that she moved to Robe city/my birthplace in



Ethiopia, where she started her own business while her husband could not find a job near her. I also heard he repeatedly threatened Baredu to close her store, quit her job, and be at home to live together before he took her life in front of her two children. I do not know if something has changed after I migrated to Canada. But I suspect not, given that in five years it is difficult to address a very ingrained patriarchal culture and deep-rooted gender norms that cannot go away easily (Van de Vijver, 2007). I have seen many women killed by their boyfriends/husbands or a man in a relationship with them. I am astounded that Ethiopian women are killed by men who they are in a relationship with Canada as well. Is killing transnational, or is the cause of killing transnational? Maybe gender norms are transnational. So, I decided to do something.

Ebba said he did not take it seriously to report that his girlfriend, Lensa, was threatened with death by a man who had an affair with her and finally took her life. But I have decided to take it seriously and report that my fellow Ethiopian sisters, mothers, and daughters have suffered in the hands of men who have relationships with them in Canada. "Take all threats seriously. There's no harm in doing that. The consequences, as in this case, can be catastrophic if you don't (Globalnews.ca November 15, 2019, 9:25 pm)", a quote from a Toronto police officer.

I am not a perfect man. How can I be? Because I grew up in those social norms. Ethiopian culture raised me to be who I am today. That is our culture. That is the culture that nurtured me to be an Ethiopian man. That culture is very deeply ingrained and cannot go away easily. I grew up there and knew myself I am who I am. I was told what a man does in the kitchen. I was told how a man could hold/carry his child on his back? I was told you must be a powerful man who decides everything under the roof because you are your house's sustainable source of income.

Of course, I like how Ethiopians have traditionally mediated their conflicts, be it marital or other conflicts. Ethiopia is rich in such traditional indigenous mediation across all ethnic groups.

I am from an Oromo ethnic background with a rich *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation institution that promotes preventing and reconciliations of any forms of conflicts. *Jarsummaa* practice is an "indigenous conflict resolution institution which is more than helping people to build solidarity and peaceful coexistence among people" (Sedeto and Ahmad 2018, p., 3). I love seeing how well-respected *Manguddoos*/elders meticulously have discussed and solved marital conflicts. Because for me, family is everything. I wish to see children happily grow up with their mom and dad. Nothing in this world can make me happier than seeing children raised with their biological mother and father. Perhaps, that is a beautiful life every child wishes to have in this world. *Jarsummaa* can help spouses to compromise their individual interests for their family, most importantly children. However, I know *Jarsummaa* sometimes coerces women to wait in an abusive marital relationship. But the social, emotional, and psychological support it provides to the spouses might help the couples think twice before making the final decision about their marriage, especially after they have children.

I was raised by a single mom from age 10, not because of divorce but natural death. My dad died when I was 10. That is it. My mom is my ever hero. She raised my four siblings and me, educated us, and graduated all of us with a minimum of bachelor's degrees. She worked both outside and inside the home. Everything was on her shoulders as a single mother, so she had to decide everything, including managing our resources. She also taught me how to cook. She taught me to love my children and family. Yes, she is an incredible mom. I had cooked for nearly four years while I was alone in Canada. I benefited from her cooking lessons given that my wife's and children's immigration process to reunite with me was delayed. Therefore, I was not entirely dependent on my wife/women.

Oh, I barely cooked again after my family came. My wife took many responsibilities in doing house chores. I know I cook delicious Ethiopian dishes except for baking *Injera*/Ethiopian bread. However, I cook mainly when my wife is not home. I like to take care of my kids. That is a beautiful thing I love to do at home. Cooking food for boys, feeding them, and everything that I can do for kids is awe-inspiring in my life. I am helping my boys with their homework. That is my responsibility. I do not know who assigned that for me. I also wash dishes but not always. Laundry things are also not an issue; I am doing that.

But still, do not get me wrong; I am not an egalitarian husband. No, I am not. I am far from establishing an egalitarian-oriented marital relationship. There might be many factors, but the first is because I am the product of male dominance social norms. However, when I heard two Ethiopian women were killed by Ethiopian men who had a relationship with them in less than one year in Toronto, something different struck me. I decided to be an MSW thesis student. As I noticed above, the death of Obse Bikila, on November 19/2020, in addition to my cousin Baredu Ifa's death in Ethiopia, and my previous work experience, all stirred interest to research the impact of gender norms change and traditional mediation on marriage. I conducted five interviews with participants from married and divorced/separated men and women Ethiopian immigrants living in Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph. I share with you now, how Ethiopians are doing in Canada regarding changing gender norms and traditional mediation.

### **1.5. Organization of the thesis**

This study is organized in five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction part, which provides the brief background of the study, research questions, purpose of the study, and the social location of the researcher. Chapter two provides the literature reviews that help to develop understanding of the existing relevant research related to gender norms change and family

mediations impact on marriage. Chapter three provides the methodology and study design that guided this research process. The fourth chapter presents the findings and discussion of the thesis. It provides the answers to the overall research questions raised in chapter one. Finally, chapter five presents the conclusion, which includes the limitations of the study, future research recommendations, and implications of the study for social work practice and education.

## **CHAPTER – TWO: LITRATURE REVIEW**

This chapter discusses the literature informed by the gender norms paradigm and the perspectives of traditional mediation on marriage. First, I outline current gender norms change and immigrant challenges related to the change in gender norms paradigm. Then, I reviewed literature on gender norms change attitude, practice, and household chores responsibility-sharing impact on marriage among immigrants in developed countries. Following this, I discussed the relationship between women empowerment and gender norms change from immigrant women's point of view. I also reviewed immigrants' women empowerment due to educational opportunities, employment, income and decision making, and newfound freedom on marriage in egalitarian gender norms-oriented countries. Finally, I explored literature documents on the potential impact of traditional mediation on immigrant families' relationships in developed countries.

### **2.1. Gender norms change and marital relationships**

#### **2.1.1. Gender norms, attitude, and practices**

Gender is a word used to distinguish the aspect of male and female attitude, behavior, and preferences that are "socially constructed rather than a function of biology" (Cislaghi and Heise 2020, p., 410). Gender roles are one of the social factors that influence the belief and behavior of men and women over time, space, and social groups (Kazianga and Wahhaj 2013, Huh,2018). Stertz et al. (2017) claimed that "gender role is considered something people do, contingent on the interactional context in which they are embedded in, by specifying what men and women generally should do, including expectations about how to be and to behave (p., 105)." Moreover, it mainly divides humans into men and women based on their reproductive function (Eagly et al., 2019), where men are perceived more masculine than women, but women are perceived more feminine than men (Kachel et al., 2016).

Gender norms also provide different rights for men and women (Mkandawire and Hendriks 2019), influences individuals' choices and decision-making differently (Huh 2018), and divide men and women relationships into the traditional family model and egalitarian family model (Ickes, 1993). In the traditional family model, women are primarily responsible for the home, childrearing, and maintaining good relationships (Van de Vijver 2007), which offers the instrumental role to men and expressive functions to women (Falconier, 2013). However, according to Stertz et al. (2017), "egalitarian family attitudes allow less gender differentiation roles where women participate in financially supporting the family and be able to have a career, while men also participate in childcare and other aspects of household labour (p., 105)."

Gender norms are not static and can change from traditional to egalitarian as the needs of society change (Mkandawire and Hendriks 2019). However, Jayachandran (2015) claimed traditional gender roles and practices are higher in developing countries that favour men over women in economic and social services, including education, health, and personal autonomy (p., 64). For instance, in sub-Saharan African countries, men mainly engage in better-paid jobs, which is an inherent characteristic of traditional gender division of labour (Aknale and Adesina 2016), and value the right of men over those of women (Corley and Sabri 2021). In such traditional norms, women appear burdened in doing house chores and taking care of children to fulfill their family needs compared to men. For example, a study conducted in the Afar pastoralist community of Ethiopia revealed that "women are engaged in house chores and taking care of children throughout the day to meet her family basic needs," while men have relatively better resting time (Ahmed et al., 2019, p., 3).

More studies revealed that such traditional gender roles significantly impact immigrant attitudes and behavior in the host countries, especially married immigrant couples in developed

countries compared to non-immigrants. Pessin and Arpino (2018) claimed that although they are exposed to more egalitarian norms in Western developed countries, immigrants from third world countries tend to hold more traditional gender norms, attitudes, and practices than non-immigrants. Moreover, Blau (2015) noted that the majority of the immigrants from less developed countries are characterized by "traditional gender norms, lower female labour force participation and higher fertility rate" than the non-immigrant residents in the USA. Such gender norms are more influenced by the social and cultural factors that immigrants grew up in countries of origin. Ironically, immigrant women from third world countries reported that they are the subject of gender-based and numerous partner violence in the host country, although they live in such an egalitarian society. For instance, Corley and Sabri (2021) noted that African immigrant women's health is threatened with gender-based violence perpetrated by an intimate partner.

On the other hand, an undeniable number of immigrants from traditional norms quickly adopt the gender norms of host countries due to the prevalence of more egalitarian attitudes in developed countries. According to Van de Vijver (2007), immigrants' education level and economic factors speed up such change to egalitarian gender norms. Other driving forces are new women's labour force participation (Kesler 2018) and acculturalization and assimilation effects (Blau, 2015).

It is important to note that this research does not address the larger aspect of immigrants' gender norms or how immigrants deal with the new egalitarian norms. Additionally, this study does not attempt to explore immigrant problems from a gender norms perspective. Instead, one aspect of this research is to explore how gender norms change, if any, impact marriage and allow Ethiopian immigrants to speak from their own lived experiences so that the reader may learn and understand the existing realities.

### **2.1.2. House chores responsibility-sharing**

For this research purpose, household chores responsibility-sharing concerns the extent to which women and men share housework, mainly cooking, cleaning, laundry, and caring for children. Married couples' perspective of routine household chores responsibility-sharing reflects gender norms ideologies; when in traditional norms the wife does the bulk of house chores, the egalitarian norms have balanced responsibilities for both husband and wife (Greenstein 1996, Evertsson 2014). Kaufman and Bernhardt (2014) also claimed that women who identify with a more traditional view of gender roles are likely to emphasize household chores and childcaring than paid jobs, while men with traditional gender roles wanted to succeed in paid jobs. On the contrary, men who identify themselves as egalitarian see the importance of sharing house chores with their spouses (Kaufman and Bernhardt 2014, p., 5). For instance, in African countries, women work from "dawn to dusk all house chores like in Ethiopia (Ahmed et al., 2019, p., 3)", or they work the "lion's share of the housework even if they are paid employees like in Nigeria" (Aknale and Adesina 2016, p., 7834). In addition, a study conducted in Botswana clearly showed that "men were not assuming the role of childrearing even on their spare time out of choice unless there are family crises (Jorosi-Tshiamo 2013, p., 38).

Regarding migration history and gender norms, spouses with traditional gender norms backgrounds tend to maintain the same gender roles in sharing housework responsibilities in the destination countries. Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2019) noted that most African immigrant husbands still think they come home and get served even if spouses are paid employees in the host country Canada. Fook (2016) also claimed that the structural male-dominance gender norms make women internalize oppression and participate in self-defeating behaviors and customs. Thus, immigrant women from traditional backgrounds take on almost all house chores and childcare responsibilities



even in developed European countries (Van de Vijver 2007, Connor et al. 2016). Such gender norms and cultural identities and practices are transnational, impacting immigrants' families and communities in the host countries (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018).

There is evidence that immigrant couples try to adapt to the host countries' egalitarian gender relationship, primarily related to female labour force participation (Blau 2015) and women's participation in post-secondary education (Van de Vijver 2007). However, no research findings or literature explicitly reveal that immigrant husbands share responsibilities with spouses equally. There might be such studies illustrating husbands' doing housework or taking care of children whenever women are at work. But I found limited insights on men doing major house chores such as cooking and cleaning. Therefore, one of the purposes of this research is to explore the lived experience of Ethiopian immigrants' spouses about household responsibilities sharing so that the reader can understand the realities.

### **2.1.3. Gender norm's role changes and immigrant marriage instability**

Spouses' disputes are inevitable regardless of the reason. However, the disputes may be escalated to a serious conflict level if what one partner considers desirable for himself is undesirable to their partner. For instance, traditional gender orientation families consider men's interests over women (Stertz et al., 2017). But the participation of African immigrant women in paid jobs in host developed countries plus doing house chores creates another stress on the women and the family (Corley and Sabri 2021). In their countries of origin, African women have obviously large extended family relatives and friends that offer psychological, emotional, and even work-related support like taking care of kids and housework.

Contrary to that, in post-migration, that support is no longer available, creating new challenges coping with house chores and employment outside work which trigger marital conflict

in immigrants' families (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018, Hyman et al., 2008). Moreover, the husbands' abdication of house chores exacerbates the conflict with already stressed women in the workplace (Stern 2017, Van de Vijver 2007). According to Gu (2019), the Taiwanese immigrant gendered division of housework significantly affects couples' well-being because disagreement over housework constitutes a major cause of marital conflicts (Gu 2019, p., 689).

Many people argue that there is a possibility that conflict that arises from changing gender norms could lead to marriage termination, although there are other factors to be considered. Antman et al. (2021) noted that, although multiple factors like unfaithfulness, financial issues, race, and religion play a significant role, gender norms changes have a considerable probability of triggering conflict that ends with marriage dissolution. However, it is important to note that this research did not measure the association between gender norms change and divorce. Instead, its emphasis is on gender norms change impact on marriage.

## **2.2. Immigrants' women empowerment and gender roles changes**

### **2.2.1. Education**

Women's education has raised their consciousness and fostered their entry into occupations with cognitive demands and prestige, similar to men's occupations (Eagly et al., 2019). However, one of the root causes of gender inequality in third-world countries is fewer education opportunities for women and girls. Jayachandran (2015) claimed that "disparities in education between males and females are very high in economically less developed countries where females are more disadvantageous than males (p., 64)". But destination countries provide better education opportunities to immigrants than back home, and this can help to empower women. For example, Connor et al. (2016) revealed that access to education opportunities has offered the chances to look

for better jobs and provide moral and psychological satisfaction for Somali immigrant women in the USA (p., 14).

In addition, education opportunities, including English skills training, help immigrant women to access services, including the legal system and other social services by themselves. Immigrant women's "highest educational attainments, current school enrollment, and English proficiency are human capital (Gerber 2020, p. 243)" and are associated with egalitarian marriage relationships (Van de Vijver (2007). Boyle and Ali (2009) also noted that educated immigrant women are less likely to be threatened by their partners and are seen as "a good example in their community for being educated (p., 65)." It is important to note that immigrant women have still lower educational levels compared to their spouses partly due to transnational gender norms, although they have better educational opportunities than back home (Okeke-Ihejirika et al. 2018, Connor et al. 2016)

### **2.2.2. Employment**

One of the advantages of immigrant women is more access to employment opportunities in destination countries than their country of origin. Immigrant women may have less access to finding a job in their country of origin than their country of destination (Gerber 2020). Connor et al. (2016) asserted that Somali immigrant women are afforded more rights and given more employment opportunities in the USA than in Somalia. In addition, African immigrant women are more open to considering the low-skill jobs than even immigrant men, primarily "to put food on the table (Okeke-Ihejirika et al. 2019, p., 589)" and secondly, it may be a newfound employment opportunity (Boyle and Ali 2009).

Women's employment has enormous implications for women's empowerment and family structure, especially for immigrants with deep-rooted male dominance gender norms. Women's

employment status is one of the best predictors of women's beliefs about gender-role equality, where employed women hold the most egalitarian beliefs (Van de Vijver 2007). Pessin and Arpino (2017) also claimed that women's labour participation is positively associated with women's empowerment, where employed women gain more power to discuss family matters with their spouses. Moreover, women's employment significantly influences the transition from traditional to egalitarian-oriented gender norms (Stertz et al., 2017).

There is no such linear relationship between employment and women's empowerment for immigrants from the countries prevailing strong traditional gender norms. For instance, even though immigrant women from Somalia have been given more employment opportunities in the USA, that does not always lead to gender equality (Connor et al. 2016). Moreover, most African immigrant women must find a "balance between their family duties and working hours; thus, men have more job opportunities and are still perceived as breadwinners," which negatively impacts women's empowerment (Okeke-Ihejirika et al. 2018, p., 438).

### **2.2.3. Newfound freedom, marriage and women's violence**

Since the mid-20th century, dramatic successes have been achieved in changing gender stereotypes in developed countries due to various social and rights groups movements, including the prominent feminist movement (Eagly et al., 2019, Doepke and Tertilt 2009). However, because of multiple oppressive systems and prevailing institutional marginalization, women are still vulnerable to those gender stereotypes in third-world countries (Jayachandran 2015). But once they are migrated to industrialized western countries, women have the probability of adapting to egalitarian gender norms (Pessin and Arpino 2018). Boyle and Ali (2009) revealed that women's employment and exposure to a women's rights discourse increase their status relative to spouses. In addition, Connor et al. (2016) noted that Somali immigrant women have better rights to access

employment, education, financial resources and protection, including 911 emergency phone in case of domestic violence laws than Somalia (p., 14)." Women socializing with friends and community support groups, and going grocery shopping without being dependent on their husbands is a newfound freedom immigrant women hold in developed countries (Connor et al. 2016)

Contrary to this newfound freedom, African immigrant women might be the subject of gender-based violence perpetrated by intimate partners in developed countries (Corley and Sabri 2021). This is partly due to transnational gender norms from the country of origin. Ironically, most African immigrant women do not usually seek help from providers in domestic violence cases, including when their male partners beat them (Connor et al., 2016). Instead, women seek mediation from their community leaders because of fear of pressure and ostracization from the community members, and police intervention makes things challenging to facilitate communication (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019). Even if they reported the violence, they dropped the case due to fear of stigmatization from the community. Boyle and Ali (2009) reported that an Ethiopian-based immigrant woman did not follow up the case she reported to the police, and she even dropped it because the community member looked up to her and blamed her for reporting her abusive husband. (p., 65).

The other most important reason women do not report to the police is that they do not want their husbands and children's fathers to be abused by the white racist police and legal system (Boyle and Ali 2009). Lynn and Dixson (2013) claimed that "black crime creates work opportunities for whites—police officers, probation officers, prison construction firms, prison guards, lawyers, judges, and court workers all benefit from high crime rates (Lynn and Dixson, 2013, p., 43)." However, even in creating work opportunities, the victim of Black crime is usually

not white but Black (Lynn and Dixson 2013). Accordingly, the abused African immigrant women do not want the domestic violence to go to the service providers or police because it attracts serious penalties for their men (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019).

Hence, immigrant women bear their pain and oppression to protect the abusers, which is contrary to newfound freedom. It is important to note that the interest of this study is not to examine the impact of the racist legal system on Black people. Instead, I am more interested in examining the impact of changing gender norms on marriage; hence newfound freedom on marriage is reviewed as one factor of gender norms changes.

#### **2.2.4. Income and decision making**

Because of low employment opportunities and lower earnings, women in third-world countries are less likely to influence the spending decision of the family (Jayachandran 2015). Akanle and Adesina (2016) also noted that in African countries, "domestic chores are mainstreamed and played by women while men serve as breadwinners," which vastly limits women's access to resources and decision-making power in the family economy (p., 7836). Conversely, in developed countries, women's higher education and labour participation increase their earnings (Schober and Scott 2012), enabling more decision-making power and less tolerance of gender-based violence (Jayachandran, 2015). Because high education and employment opportunities are translated into better earnings in the economic realm, immigrant women have many opportunities to make better money in host countries than in countries of origin. Gerber (2020) claimed educated immigrant women have a high probability of making higher money and increasing their contribution to the family in western developed countries.

Similarly, immigrant women with full working hours of employment and the ability to contribute to the family are features of an egalitarian-oriented family relationship and the women

in these families can negotiate decisions with their partners (Boyle and Ali 2009). Adserà and Ferrer (2014) revealed that in Canada, even uneducated immigrant women "with basic skills may fit the profile of secondary jobs and gain better earnings" that enhance their bargaining power of women on family matters (p., 360). Overall, immigrant women's employment opportunities in the host countries allow them to contribute to the family economy, enabling them to negotiate responsibility-sharing of household chores and gain more decision-making power over the family budget (Gu 2019, Shiu and Tang 2017).

On the contrary, due to transnational gender norms, women are less exercising their existing freedom and rights and less participating in paid jobs they have found in the host countries. Connor et al. (2016) asserted that most immigrant married women keep doing most of the housework and take part-time paid jobs, which minimizes their earnings and reduces their bargaining power on family matters. In addition, immigrant women from countries of origin with more traditional norms are busy balancing homework, family, and childcare with little or no time to contribute to their families' economy (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019, Adserà and Ferrer, 2014). Hence, they are mostly participating in part-time jobs or are dependent on government support like welfare, which negatively impacts their labour participation directly and decision-making power on family matters indirectly (Gerber 2020, Schober and Scott 2012.)

This literature review suggests that income and earnings increase the power of women's decision-making. On the other hand, immigrant women from traditional gender norms are still influenced by the transnational male dominance gender norms, although they live in egalitarian relationship-oriented countries. However, both women's earnings and traditional gender norms' impact on women's decision-making power are not the focus of this study. Rather, this paper examines gender norms change and the impact of traditional mediation on marriage; therefore, this

part of the literature discusses women's earning and decision-making power as a factor in changing gender norms.

#### **2.2.5. Women empowerment and marriage conflict**

As reviewed in the above literature review, education, employment, newfound freedom, and earnings enhance women's bargaining power in decision-making and less tolerance of gender-based violence. A study conducted among Somali immigrants in the USA noted that women's opportunity to access income, wealth, social services, and legal protection could enhance their capacity to deal with family matters equally with male partners (Connor et al. 2016, p.,14). In addition, women's decision-making power brings new beliefs and practices in relationships, which the couples must consider and rethink another way of communication (Gu 2019). However, immigrant husbands from traditional gender norms backgrounds may not always positively welcome such changes. As African immigrant women have embraced paid work to boost the family economy, so African immigrant men should do household chores too. But, according to Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2019), African immigrant husbands are "either unwilling or ill-equipped" to share household chores responsibility, which frustrates and upset the women and strain the relationship (p., 590).

Therefore, whenever male partners do not recognize the newfound gender roles even though they live in egalitarian gender norm countries, the couples may be driven into disputes and marriage conflict. Boyle and Ali (2009) asserted that because Somali women are empowered and contribute to the family economy that influences the decision-making, new disputes have prevailed that interrupt marriage in USA. Ethiopia, a country from the Horn of Africa, shares many cultural features and similarities with Somalia. Hence, the transnational gender norms of immigrant families in the receiving country may contribute to the disagreements that often lead to the



dissolution of marriages. It is very important to note here that this study is not against gender equality, and in fact, I have strongly supported the egalitarian oriented family relationships. An essential purpose of this research is to explore gender norms change on marriage among Ethiopian immigrants in Canada. There are few studies that consider gender norms change and traditional mediation impact on marriage. Hence, this study aims to open up a space for married and divorced Ethiopian immigrants to speak about their experiences so that the reader of this research can learn and understand an element of the complexities shaping immigrant couples in Canada.

### **2.3. Traditional family mediation and its impact on marriage**

The terms reconciliation, negotiation, mediation, and arbitration are embedded in the indigenous-based institutions, in which the ultimate purpose is to encourage conflict prevention and find a solution in the peace-building process (Hussein 2011). In African countries, indigenous mediation institutions have rich experiences, are influential in society, and mediate any conflict, including marriage (Macfarlane 2007). Such cultural institutions are led by volunteers and very respected elders in the community, and the mediation process considers the value of a given society (Mullela 2014). In addition, traditional family mediation considers the family's social, emotional, and psychological values, especially children, and focuses on improving communication and maintaining relationships between spouses (Sisay 2015).

Many African immigrants in western developed countries miss such powerful social norms; however, they contact their community before reporting to the formal service provider to solve their disputes. Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2019) claimed that many African immigrant victims of domestic violence seek support from their community members and spiritual or religious advisors to mediate and reconcile the problems before they turn to formal service providers, including the police. Therefore, African immigrant women might prefer informal social and emotional support

from their community members to arbitrate marital conflicts. Kamenecka-Usova (2014) states that family mediation's unique opportunity is to devote full attention to emotional and passionate attachment, leading both parties to reconciliation and reunification.

In Ethiopia, mediation has different names in different ethnic groups, such as *Jarsumma* among the Oromo community, *Shimgilina* in the Amhara community, *Gudagambela* among the Kambata community, etc which mediate any conflict, including marriage disputes (Mengesha et al., 2015). For instance, cultural elites and elders called *Manguddoos* lead the *Jarsumma* of Oromo, whose power is perceived as legitimate and make decisions and promises on behalf of the disputants (Mullea 2014, p., 619). The primary purpose of the *Jarsummaa* is to keep the family together and protect the children from mental and physical abuse because if the marriage is terminated, children are, for the most part, victims. Anderson (2014) said, "divorce could diminish the future competence of children in all areas, including, social, relationships, education, emotional and well-being (p. 380)". In addition, Prevoo and Weel (2014) indicated that "children who experience family disruptions between birth and age 16 score significantly lower in terms of self-esteem and internal locus of control (p., 7)". Furthermore, Lee and Bax (2000) claimed that children who have encountered parents' divorce display various emotional and behavioral reactions, including regress, anxiety, and depressions symptoms that affect their social relationships and school performances (p. 217). Therefore, the *Manguddoos*/elders mediate marital conflicts to protect the families and children from not being the victims of divorce.

On the other hand, sometimes marital dissolution might be the best option for children's development than consistently seeing their parents' conflicts. Kaczynski (2006) indicated that the consequences of marital conflict on children's psychological and emotional development are very complex, with unresolved marital conflict potentially negatively affecting many areas of children's

functioning. In addition, Cummings and Davies (2002) claimed that children react to frequent parents' conflict with an "elevated level of fear, distress, and anger (p. 42)." Thus, frequent spousal conflict can negatively impact children's emotional and psychological development, indicating that divorce may be the best option. *Jarsummaa* also works towards safe marital dissolution without harming spouses and children. Sisay (2015) indicated that if reconciliation does not work during traditional mediation, the *Manguddoos*/elders can facilitate a divorce settlement without harming both parties, thereby taking all the necessary accountability and diligence to resolve the hostility.

Despite such positive influence in solving the disputes fairly and making peace, the elders selected for *Jarsummaa* sometimes coerce women to wait in abusive marital relationships without addressing the cause of the conflict due to male dominance social norms (Abraham et al., 2021). It seems the elders' power to coerce women reflects their social power, which emanates mainly from cultural norms and practices. But, according to Mulleta (2014), the *Jarsummaa*, like any other traditional mediation, works based on the spouses' interest, and the disputants have the right to reject biased decisions proposed by mediators. However, with all its weaknesses, such important cultural institutions are missed among immigrant communities in the destination countries, where at the same time, the immigrants experience new gender norms that might drive couples into dispute.

There is limited insight into an informal social support system in Canada, specifically for African immigrants who have such an experience in their country of origin. Hence, this research explores how much *Jarsummaa* or traditional mediation impacts the marriage of Ethiopian immigrants living in Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph.

## **2.4. Theoretical and conceptual framework**

### **2.4.1. Theories about gender role changes and Family mediation**

Many theories relate the beginning of gender roles change with second demographic transition theories. Goldscheider et al. (2015) argued that the second demography transition is realized as an overview of trends in gender norms change and is very important in explaining the decline in fertility rates. He claimed a decline in women's fertility rate paves the way for both parents' employment, changes gender stereotypes, and reduces work-family conflict for spouses with active parenting (Goldscheider et al., 2015). Other groups relate gender norms stereotype change with men and women's broader social role transformation. According to social psychology theory, gender roles changes are associated with the direct and indirect observable beliefs and behavior of women and men changes in their social groups (Eagly and wood 2013). In addition, Koenig and Eagly (2014) noticed that "social perceivers observe the behaviors in the context of social roles due to social life that is organized by occupational, family, friendship, leisure, and other roles, each of which is associated with certain types of men and women attitude and practices (p., 372)".

Other groups also linked gender norms changes with the rights group movement, the prominent feminist movement that addresses women's marginalization from social, economic, and political involvement (Stake, 2007). Such groups' theories gender norms change with women's access to basic social services (education, health, and protection) and economic opportunities (employment and access to financial and material resources) that question men's role as a sole sustainable source of the household economic base. Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015) explained that "the dynamics of gender role changes are the consequence of the unfolding social

transformation of women's rights and roles primarily, a pervasive normative fluctuation that eroded the male breadwinner–female housewife model (p. 6)."

Changing gender norms from traditional to egalitarian relationships often might not be positively recognized among husbands who believe in traditional gender role stereotypes. Pessin (2018) emphasized that changes in gender norms could probably infuriate the couples if the family could not embrace gender egalitarianism, which leads to family instability and divorce. But some theories consider gender norms changes to the egalitarian family as a positive step even to reduce family conflict because the family may be benefited in the long term. Goldscheider et al. (2015) assessed women empowerment and family dispute in two phases of the gender revolution. He said changing gender roles may trigger family conflict in the first phase because of the uncertainties associated with introducing a new culture at home. However, during the second phase, because the families have benefited more from women's engagement in economic activities, they could "embrace an egalitarian family" that can no more cause conflict on gender issues. (Goldscheider et al., p. 210)

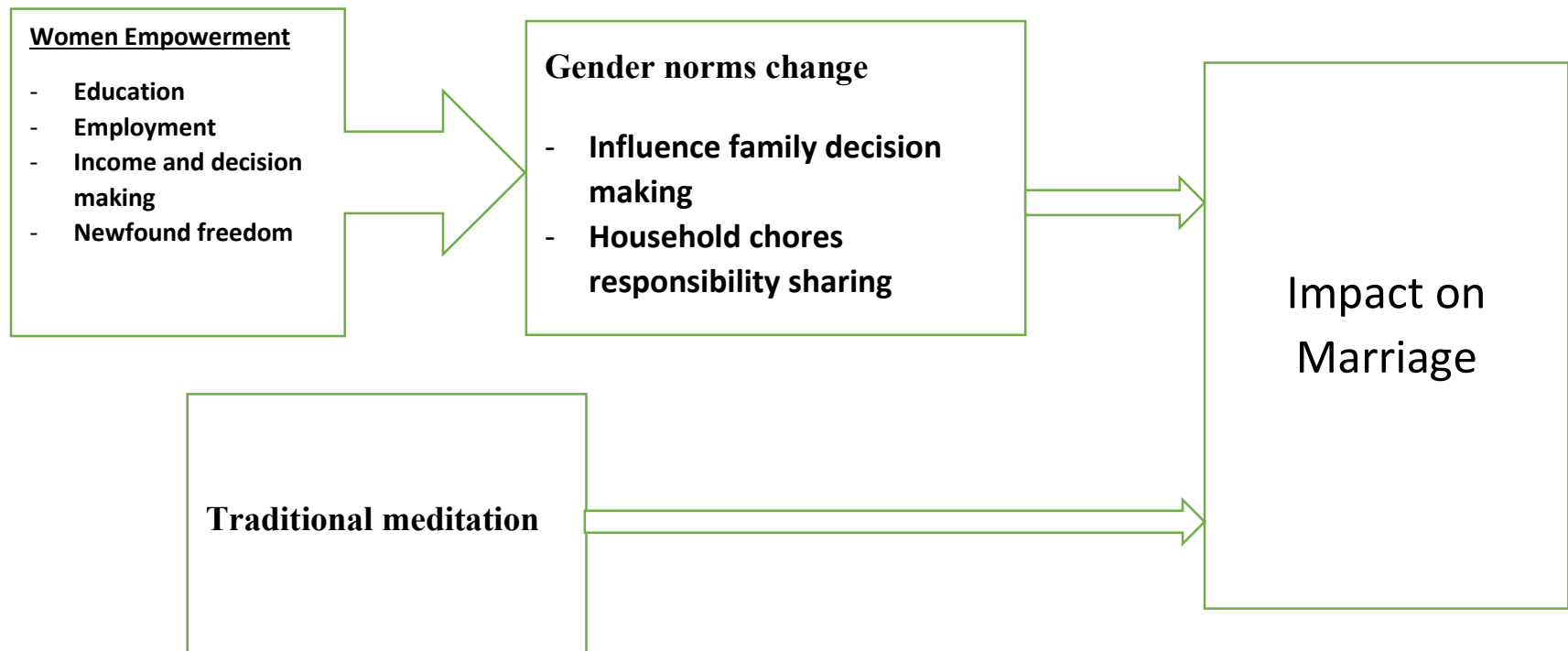
Unlike gender roles change theory, theories on traditional family mediation are not available. However, empirical evidence shows that extended families have provided social, emotional, and psychological support in countries of origin when the spouses get into marriage conflict (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019). On the contrary, the absence of an extended family social support system might negatively influence marriages, and the immigrants might seek traditional mediation from their community. Boyle and Ali (2009) claimed immigrant families seek traditional mediation to solve marriage problems because such social institutions may consider families' social, emotional, and psychological values during mediation. But such social institutions, for example, in Ethiopia, might also have a weakness when they could not adequately

address the cause of the conflict instead coerce the women to bear the pain even when abused and continue married (Abraham et al., 2021).

Overall, research studies show that immigrants experience marital instability and higher divorce rates than non-immigrants in the Western developed world (Furtado et al., 2013). However, to date, marital dissolutions of immigrant communities, which may result from changing gender norms and absence of social support systems in host countries, have received little policy and academic attention. Existing studies indicate that some immigrant communities encounter challenges with gender norms change, which could be a cultural shock for integration and adaptability. Changes in gender norms and the absence of social, emotional, and psychological support during spouses' marital conflict due to being disconnected from their social base might impact immigrants' marital relationships.

This study pays particular attention to the impact of gender norms change and traditional marital mediation led by the immigrant community on marriage. Therefore, like all African immigrants, women's empowerment due to access to social and economic support systems in host countries can impact Ethiopian immigrants' marital relationships. In addition, immigrant Ethiopians might seek mediation led by community members to solve marital conflicts. Hence, this study examines the impact of changing gender norms and traditional mediation on marriage and helps the reader understand from Ethiopians' lived experiences.

## 2.5. Conceptual framework



## **CHAPTER – THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Constructivism Paradigm**

This research is guided by the constructivism paradigm, which argues that reality is "constructed by social actors and people's perceptions to it" (Wahyuni 2012, p., 71). According to Wahyuni (2012), the constructivism paradigm assumes that people from different settings and with different assumptions and experiences contribute to the ongoing construction of reality through social interaction. Constructivism provides insights into beliefs and practices about norms and patterns of the particular social reality being studied (Carver 2003). Therefore, the constructionist paradigm allows me to interact with the participants to understand the socially constructed gender norms and family mediation's impact on marriage.

In the constructivist paradigm, "human perspectives and experiences are subjective, social reality may change and have multiple perspectives" (Wahyuni 2012, p., 71). Qualitative study design allows me to explore how social constructs of change in gender norms and family mediation impact marriage among Ethiopian immigrants. Constructivism uses a narrative form of analysis to explain the particular and detailed socially constructed reality being studied (Losantos et al., 2016, Wahyuni 2012). Hence, applying the constructivism paradigm provides the best mechanism for answering this study's research questions. This paradigm also makes it possible for me to understand the socially constructed phenomenon of gender norms change and traditional mediation on immigrant marriage from the perspective of men and women from Ethiopia.

### **3.2. Epistemological framework**

This study relies on the social constructionism epistemological framework, which is guided by how "research participants construct and make sense of their reality and that reality is subjective to social phenomena" (Wahyuni 2012, p., 70)". An investigation is a collaborative process



involving the researcher and participants, creating meanings and realities within the interaction process (Lesantos et al., 2016). In applying the epistemological constructionist framework, I positioned myself to a "not-knowing attitude." According to Lesantos et al. (2016), "not knowing attitude" is the principle that guides the researchers to set aside their own beliefs, perspectives, and predispositions to take all participants' ideas to enrich the understanding of participants' experience (p., 33). The not-knowing attitude minimizes my influence on the gender norms change and traditional mediation, although my social construct background is part of what is being researched. Therefore, the "not knowing attitude" limited my influence and offered me to hear the participants' experiences and socially constructed phenomena during data collection and analysis.

The interview process, where the researcher asked questions and the participants responded, was transformed into a conversation, and questions evolved from answers provided by participants (Lesantos et al., 2016). Such investigation is a collaborative process between the researcher and the participants in constructing new ways of knowledge (Losantos et al., 2016). Finally, the researcher produces the reports using narrative and descriptive methods, such as small stories and participants' experiences. Therefore, socially constructed knowledge is produced using insights and perspective meanings or real meanings of the study participants (Wahyuni 2012). I believe gender norms are socially constructed. Hence, I chose to explore gender norms changes and traditional mediation impact on marriage using a constructionist epistemology framework.

### **3.3. Study design**

This study explores the effect of changing gender norms and traditional family mediation on marriage among Ethiopian immigrants in Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph. A qualitative research method is used to explore the lived experiences of the immigrants and to answer the research questions. A qualitative research method is an open-ended and exploratory stance that

offers the researcher the opportunity to understand the reason behind a phenomenon (Taguchi 2018). This method helps to collect the qualitative data of the participants' experiences and deals with elements that emerge in the data (Wahyuni 2012). Moreover, data from the interview and field notes are rich, producing abundant information on the participants' behaviour, views, and thoughts. In addition, qualitative approaches identify changes and provide both individual and contextual side explanations for the changes (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Hence, I used the qualitative approach to explore immigrant Ethiopians' lived experiences of gender norms change and traditional mediation impact on marriage. The method allowed me to collect in-depth qualitative data and understand gender norms changes and traditional meditation impact on marriage on Ethiopian immigrants living in Canada.

### **3.4. Participants' recruitment**

The study group of this research is limited to Ethiopian Immigrants residing in Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph. I started communications with Ethiopian community members one and a half years ago before the data collection when I moved to Kitchener to pursue the MSW at Wilfrid Laurier University. Since then, I have been with Kitchener-Waterloo Ethiopian and Oromo community members; thus, I am on the community members' regular communication social media platforms such as Viber and WhatsApp. My active involvement in the community makes me more familiar with the members. It also helped me build trust because I share similar cultural backgrounds and values with the study group.

During proposal writing, I have shared the information that I am doing research on Ethiopian Immigrants who have lived in Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph with the Ethiopian and Oromo community committees. In addition, I reached out to other community members like the Ethiopian Somali community and Tigraian Kitchener-Waterloo through the Association of

Ethiopian Community members. The Ethiopian Association of Kitchener-Waterloo serves as an umbrella for other community members, including Ethiopian Immigrants who live in Guelph.

The eligible participants were identified and recruited by the principal investigator. To be eligible for the study, the participants must be married or in a relationship in Ethiopia before they immigrated to Canada. They must also be first-generation Ethiopian immigrants to Canada. The assumption is that the participants had gained enough experience and knowledge about gender norms in Ethiopia. In addition, the participants must have lived in Canada for more than five years to understand the effect of Canadian gender norms in their lived experience. Participants were selected from Kitchener, Waterloo, or Guelph.

Before the recruitment, I prepared a flyer with information and a brief explanation about the purpose of the study, participants' eligibility criteria, who was conducting the study, and my email account to reach out to me if they decided to participate in the study. The flyer was first prepared in English then translated to Afan Oromo and Amharic languages to help the participants understand the message easily in their native languages. The purpose of the flyer was to give information to the participants, and it was reviewed and approved by Wilfrid Laurier University Ethics Review Board. Then finally, I shared the flyers with all members through the community social media platform, i.e., Viber and WhatsApp. Accordingly, I was contacted by people who wanted to participate in the study.

Before starting the interview, I emailed a soft copy of the consent form to each identified eligible participant. The consent form was first prepared in English, and then I translated it to Afan Oromo and Amharic to help the participants understand the detail in their native language. In addition, I explained it to them before they signed the consent form for the participants who had a question on the consent form. The one-on-one interview was conducted after the participants

signed, scanned, and emailed back the signed informed consent form to me. The consent form outlined the purpose, procedure, confidentiality, and other necessary descriptions of the research, including an agreement to participate to be signed.

Given that I am actively involved with the community members and share similar cultural backgrounds and values with the participants, I was very surprised at the difficulty associated with recruiting the study participants, suggesting that gender norms and marriage issues remain highly stigmatized. During the interview phase, the participants were offered a compensation gift card which was deemed compatible with what the participants could miss from not being at due to participating in the interview.

### **3.5. Data collection**

The data were collected using semi-structured interview guidelines. The interview process allows the researcher to communicate face-to-face with the participants during data collection (Wahyuni 2012). However, I was not allowed to do an in-person face-to-face interview due to the restriction imposed by COVID-19. Therefore, the data was collected in one-on-one in-depth interviews using the zoom platform. The semi-structured interview questions consisted of two parts: the demographic information part and the major component of the interview questions. The demographic part includes questions about age, gender, education level, current marital status, number of years married/divorced, the number of children, year of immigration, and number of years in Canada. This study focuses on heterosexual couples.

The second part of the interview questions' probe into spouses' household chores responsibility-sharing, women's participation in education and paid jobs, income and couples' decision-making, marital conflict, and traditional family mediation. The interview guide can be found in Appendix – C. The interviews were audio-recorded using zoom technology. In addition,

I used field notes to systematically document responses and any of my own reactions to the conversation during the data collection.

I prepared the semi-structured interview guide question in English, then translated it to Afan Oromo and Amharic to make the interview easier for the participants. I was guided by a "not-knowing attitude" during the data collection, analysis, and interpretation to reduce my influence on the data. The "not-knowing attitude" allows the researchers to set aside their own beliefs, perspectives, and predispositions to take all participants' perspectives as unique and valuable for the research (Lesantos 2016, p., 33).

I used field journals during the data collection stage to reflect on my perspectives, thoughts, views, feelings, and experiences. I also maintained such journaling throughout the study, and I returned to memos created in the coding process. Furthermore, during the interview stage, I reframed the interview questions using the participants' context and locations and expanded the question when necessary.

The interviews and discussion were conducted in three languages, English and other two Ethiopian most spoken language, i.e., Afan Oromo and Amharic, based on the language skills and preferences of the participants. All the participants speak Afan Oromo fluently, Amharic as a second language, and English to some extent. I did four interviews in Afan Oromo, but participants have used Amharic in the middle of the discussion whenever they wanted to explain their idea more, also in English too. For example, participants used the English word gender norm than its Afan Oromo and Amharic meanings. I did the fifth interview in English.

I am a fluent speaker of these three languages. I discussed with the participants without a translator, which helped them express their feelings, perspectives, and insights without any barrier. Simultaneously, it allowed me to understand participants' key insights, perspectives, and

experiences. I felt confident speaking to the participants because I spoke the same language and shared similar cultural backgrounds and gender norms experiences with the participants. I intentionally reminded myself to have a "not-knowing attitude" to avoid appearing to be an expert; instead, I saw participants as experts on their experiences. The semi-structured interview was designed to elicit the interviewees' ideas, history, experiences about changing gender norms and solving marital disputes. I prepared predetermined questions and keywords to use as a guide for the interview. The interview questions were open-ended. In many interviews, I combined questions or skipped questions when necessary, depending on how the participants presented the narratives or answered the questions.

The nature of the semi-structured interview allowed me to be flexible and to add exploratory questions based on the participants' responses. The challenge with the semi-structured interview was making lengthy conversations and sometimes off-topic discussions by participants. My previous experience making an assessment and understanding of facilitating discussion on gender norms and harmful traditional practices in Ethiopia helped me to guide the interview to get back on track of the topic using participants' own cues. However, some participants needed more probing in the semi-structured interviews, while some answered several questions simultaneously.

### **3.6. Data analysis and report writing**

Thematic analysis approach was applied for data analysis. I chose the thematic analysis approach because it complements research conducted within a constructionist paradigm and illustrates response patterns to some degree or meaning within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is the most used for qualitative study design (Thomas and Harden, 2008) and is a flexible method that supports researchers in exploring perspectives among participants (Jackson and Nowell, 2021). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), "thematic analysis is a method used

for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (p., 79)." In addition, thematic analysis seeks to describe patterns across qualitative data by thematic data analysis, thematic decomposition, phenomenal interpretive analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It also enables to deal "with the result of the primary studies and facilitate the explicit production of new concepts" (Thomas and Harden, 2008, p.,8). It also narrates and describes the socio-cultural context from the constructionist standpoint of view (Braun and Clarke 2006).

I found two thematic analysis methods: Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and Thomas and Harden's (2008) way of thematic analysis. Both ways are similar in finding a final product, i.e., generating final themes, but minor differences are in the steps they follow. Thomas and Harden (2008) summarized the steps in three overlapped stages: stages one and two, coding texts and developing descriptive themes, respectively, and stage three, generating final themes. On the other hand, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis used six phases, which goes to producing the final report. Therefore, I decided to apply Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guiding thematic analysis. However, please note that there are "no hard and fast rules in thematic analysis, and different combinations are possible (Braun and Clark 2006, p., 86)." Hence, I applied Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of thematic analysis in the following manner.

The data analysis process of this project started after the first interview during the data collection period. Unfortunately, the data collection took one month and fifteen days because some participants took some time to decide to participate in the study. In addition, after the participants communicated to me their decision, each participant needed a convenient time to set up a zoom meeting. Therefore, I had a minimum of three to four days to conduct the following interview, which allowed me to familiarize myself with each collected data. It also created a good opportunity to start the analysis right after I finished the first interview.

Regarding the transcription and translation, Oromo is my mother tongue, and I learned Amharic from my childhood from neighbors and schools in Ethiopia. In addition, I had translated assessment and project evaluation data collected in Afan Oromo and Amharic to English on many occasions when I used to work in non-government international organizations in Ethiopia. So, I have strong experience in translating Afan Oromo and Amharic languages writings into English

I transcribed the first interview in Afan Oromo then translated the Afan Oromo transcription to English. However, I found this process was tiresome and time-consuming. Therefore, I decided to do the following transcriptions directly in English. But before I did direct transcription in English, I wanted to check the accuracy of the data if I could do direct transcription to English from recording. Therefore, I heard the recording I first transcribed, read the English translation, and triangulated with Afan Oromo transcription to check the accuracy of the data. I was satisfied that the recording was similar to the English translation. Therefore, I directly transcribed to English from the recording, which significantly shortened the time I spent on transcription and translation. The interview I did in English was transcribed directly by zoom technology. I did data checking and clearing for this transcription because zoom technology might not capture some pronunciation correctly.

Similarly, after I finished the first transcription, I started the coding. At this stage, I extracted the transcribed interview into pieces of data and mapped them based on the overall patterns and the relationship between data to generate the initial codes. The third step was searching for themes, so I sorted out the initial codes into potential themes. This was done by analyzing and combining different codes to form the overarching themes. In the fourth phase, I reviewed the themes. Reviewing the themes includes refinement and checking the validity of individual themes to accurately represent the initial codes in relation to the data set. In the fifth



phase, I defined and named the themes, which included determining the aspect of each theme captured and defined sub-themes that give structure to large and complex data.

I went through such steps separately for the five-interview data I collected. Then I brought all themes together and defined the final themes and sub-themes for the project. Finally, the six-stage was writing a report. I began report writing after the theme and sub-themes were worked out.

### **3.7. Ethical consideration**

The study is conducted following the guidelines of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS) in Canada. The research has been reviewed and approved by Wilfrid Laurier Research Ethics Board to minimize the risk to participants associated with this study.

Participant informed consent form, flyer, and semi-structured interview were translated to Afan Oromo and Amharic languages to clarify to the participants who might not understand the English language very well. I emailed the participants the translated consent form based on their language preferences as soon as they contacted me, they wanted to participate in the study. Then they took a minimum of two to three days and others even up to one week to read and understand the consent form and inform me of their final decision. Once they decided to continue to participate in the study, I provided more explanation on the issues they raised, or the points were not clear for the participants.

I also explained to the participants that they could withdraw from the interview at any time. I also informed them that they had the full right not to answer any questions if they felt discomfort and or discontinue the study. In addition, I informed the participants that they were not obliged to participate in the study because I am an active member of the community. Furthermore, I informed the participants that their personal information is not disclosed at any time and in any circumstance;

instead, pseudonyms are used for data analysis and interpretation. Moreover, I informed them that only my supervisor and I had access to the audio recording and that my computer is locked with a password; thus, nobody can access it. I also informed the participants that I could refer them to the nearest counseling center if they felt upset, anxious, and traumatized while discussing uncomfortable life experiences. Accordingly, two community service giving counseling agencies, one in Kitchener and one in Guelph, were identified prior to data collection stage.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The one-on-one semi-structured in-depth interviews took through zoom audio meetings with five people, two men, and three women. The participants demographic profile is presented in the table below. The findings and discussions of this study is presented in combined format under the “Finding and Discussion chapter”.

Table - 1: Study participants' demographic profiles

<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Highest Education level completion</b>	<b>Number of Years lived in Canada</b>	<b>Number of years in marriage</b>	<b>Current Marital Status</b>
Urjii Barii	Female	67	Tertiary education	30	47	Married
Bakkalcha Barii	Male	56	High school	36	32	Married
Boru Baraqa	Male	51	Tertiary education	15	20	Married
Lalistu Margaa	Female	29	High school	7	6	Divorced
Dhala Namaa	Female	34	High school	14	8	Separated

### 4.1. Transnational gender norms

The semi-structured interviews began with the participants discussing the differences in gender norms in Ethiopia and Canada. This section presents excerpts from the interview together with the highlights of the experiences of the participants. It also presents discussions and interpretations.

#### 4.1.1. Traditional oriented relationship

In-depth interviews demonstrate that participants followed the expectations of societies in regard to men and women in Ethiopia. All participants responded that men and women did not even discuss responsibility-sharing in Ethiopia because men and women's responsibilities are all known in society. So, nobody talked about men doing house chores or women working outside like agriculture in rural areas. The participants also shared their experiences of sharing household

chores in Canada. All the participants understand the Ethiopian social setting is different from the Canadian context. For instance, Boru Baraqa explained his experience of Ethiopia and Canada as follows

The culture that I was born and grew up is that men could not walk into the kitchen, let alone cook. I never cooked in Ethiopia. I did not remember I saw a man cooking back home. That was our culture. In Canada as well, my wife does everything at home most of the time. I studied BSW and MSW in Canada. Surprisingly, I am not helping my wife in homework as I should. She is a full-time employed, but she does all house chores. I only help my children in schooling, helping them doing assignments, and helping my wife buy stuff from the store. I think my country Ethiopia norms came with us. I feel it is a kind of cultural deficit.

On the contrary, Urjii Barii said she has embraced an egalitarian family relationship. She shared her experience as follows

I was a journalist and employed in Ethiopia. My husband was an engineer and was also employed. We had a servant for cooking and nannies for the kids. We were both professional and did not do house chores. But, as a society, Ethiopia was highly gendered work division, where women do all house chores, and men are the providers or the sustainable source of family income.

When I came to Canada, my children were already teenagers. I tried to create democratic-egalitarian gender norms within the family. So, the boys and girls cook. My husband joined us lately, and he is very egalitarian-oriented in terms of political struggle. He was one of the leaders in the liberation struggle and wanted female emancipation in our

struggle. So, he cooked and was even delicious food than I do. That is the experiences I have.

On the contrary, Bakkalcha Barii explained below that he has not cooked in Canada. But he only participated in making money, or he is a financial provider both in Canada and Ethiopia. He explained as follows.

Our lifestyle was very different in Ethiopia. Let me tell you, if a neighbor saw a man in the kitchen, that was very shameful not only for him but also for his wife. As far as I knew, a husband did not take and eat even the prepared food in Ethiopia. A woman or girl put the food for him on the table. That is it. That was our culture, our norm. Men were the source of income or worked outside, but women did not.

In Canada, many men have repeated the same behaviour too. Even the woman did not want her husband do house chores. I have been married for the past 32years. My children are all adults now. I helped my wife taking care of kids, although I have never cooked. I sometimes changed the diaper, fed bottled milk, gave them prepared food, and helped children with schooling stuff.

The experiences of Lalistu Margaa and Dhala Namaa, are also the same. They pointed out that there are no differences with the other three participants regarding gender norms.

Lalistu Margaa: In Ethiopia, everybody understood women could not work outside. They thought only husband did paid jobs or in agricultural activities. For instance, I had no job in Ethiopia. I was only doing homework every day. My husband was responsible for buying everything for the house but only what he wanted to buy.

But after I came to Canada, I saw Canadian non-immigrants helping their wives. Same African and Ethiopian immigrants husband doing house chores. But the experience

for me and my ex-husband was totally different. My husband worked outside, and when he came home, he sat and was looking for food to be served. I did not expect any help from him at all. I rarely asked him to fold his clothes after I did laundry. He did not want to fold even his clothes.

Dhala Namaa also shared the following to indicate that there are traditional oriented relationships.

Dhala Namaa: I had been married for eight years but have separated for the past two years. If I tell you my experience, it is really frustrating. We are actually separated, but my husband did not help me at home. No, he did not at all. On the other hand, I wanted to work, make money and help my family. I had been a full-time employee and sometimes worked overtime to change my life. And when I came home, I was doing house chores myself. Nobody helped me. I did not have any help from my husband. I did not have rest, and I remember I was about to fall down at the workplace sometimes. That was my eight years of marriage experience shortly. I feel many Ethiopian women encountered the same problems. Our men did not want to learn this country's gender norms. Men do not want to understand the burden of women. Except a few of them, Ethiopian immigrant men cannot be changed at all.

The qualitative data revealed that Ethiopian immigrants couples are not sharing the responsibilities associated with house chores equally. That could be the impact of the immigrants' background norms. The highly gendered division of labour in Ethiopia contributed to immigrants to hold similar traditional-gender norms in western developed countries (Blau 2015). Such gender norms are attributed to countries of origin, and they are transnational. Except Urjii Bari and her husband, other participants explained that women are the most responsible person for doing house chores. Urjii Bari family had already embraced egalitarian gender norms because her husband

struggled for political liberation and believed in the empowerment of women. Therefore, Urjii Barii can be seen as outliers who are freestanding individuals that deviate from society or category and might influence the group members' behavior (Dannals and Miller 2017).

The qualitative data also demonstrated that, although women have participated in paid jobs, their spouses were looking for food to be served when they came home from work. Such a phenomenon proved that African Immigrant husbands continue looking for food and being served when they come home even if their spouses are employees in Canada (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019). It seems Ethiopians are struggling to adjust to Canadian norms even though they live in an egalitarian society.

Mkandarwire and Hendriks (2019) claimed that gender norms are changing with societal needs and levels of development. However, Ethiopian immigrants mostly practice traditional male dominance gender norms because of their cultural background influence. For example, the shared qualitative data illustrated that the Ethiopian immigrant man who has lived in Canada for 32 years has not been doing household chores, especially cooking, cleaning, and dishwashing, the same as the man who has lived in Canada for 7 years. In a similar manner, the interview data depicted that a husband who has post-secondary education (tertiary education) has not doing house chores same as a man who did not attend post-secondary education. However, the literature review indicated that length of exposure to egalitarian gender norms and exposure to post-secondary education accelerate the change from tradition to egalitarian-oriented gender norms (Van de Vijver, 2007, and Blau, 2015). Therefore, the qualitative data finding put the effect of immigrants' length of exposure and post-secondary education impact in doubt.

I wanted to note that, I am super cautious about summarizing the impact of length of exposure and education level on gender norms change. Because this study only depends on small

sample size. So, it needs further investigation to measure the impact of length of exposure and post-secondary education factors on gender norms change. Overall, the literature review and the qualitative data revealed that Ethiopian immigrant spouses are highly likely impacted by traditional gender norms influence of their country of origin. Therefore, such gender norms negatively impact marital relationships when women participate in paid jobs.

#### **4.1.2. Manhood – a feature of male-dominant gender norms**

The participants pointed out that Ethiopian immigrants held male-dominant gender norms; therefore, women are less likely to exercise their rights. They further claimed that men imposed their interests on women, which is mainly the indication of traditional oriented relationships. Lalistu Margaa explained the situation she had with her ex-husband,

After we came to Canada, we opened a joint bank account, but my husband took the ATM card. He did not care about us. So, he wanted to control everything. Then, I did not see what Canadian dollars looks like for one year. He could buy what he wanted to buy. I have a horrible story to tell you on this. We arrived in Kitchener in October 2016. I asked him to buy winter shoes for my daughter and me. But he did not buy for us on time. He said, I will buy when it is on sale. So, until mid-January 2017, my daughter and I did not have a pair of winter shoes. Basically, he did not want me out from home that is why he did not buy shoes for us. I was attending an English skill class. He had already told me I must quit but I said no.

One day it was snowing heavily for long hours. I used a public bus. My daughter and I wore summer season shoes. I held my four-year-old daughter in my left hand. I had to cross and board the bus on the other side of the road. But I slipped and fell in the center of the road. We could not be able to stand up. My daughter and I sat in the center of the



road, and cars came to us in both directions. Oh my God, the car was about to run on us. The bus operator was watching us. I was shocked and shivering because the car would have hit us. At the end we stood up and walk out from the center of the road. I did not forget that bus operator. He apologized when we board; he said, "I am so sorry." But I said to myself, "it is not you; my husband did this to me." Until now, when it is cold, my leg is numb during cold weather. I will never forget that situation in my life. That was really a subjugation.

Urjii Barii said she had mediated marriage conflict on many occasions, and she has been very close to Ethiopian immigrant families. She said she had been a community leader for so many years, as well as she is a professor in the Social Work field and a prominent black feminist. She said she has struggled for political liberation in Ethiopia, immigrant women empowerment and volunteered in the Oromoo community in most part of her productive ages. She said she had not encountered male dominance norms in her home because her husband has been an egalitarian-oriented democratic man who advocates for female emancipation. However, she has gotten enough opportunities to notice how male dominance ingrained gender norms affect the Ethiopian immigrant families in Canada.

She explained

I had mediated many people's marriage conflicts. The culture we came from is highly patriarchal and oppressive. The culture here is patriarchal, too, but they have created structures like policies, legal structures, and service providers to protect the oppression of women from violence. But the culture we bring here really imposes itself, like it cannot go away easily. It is transnational and highly patriarchal gender norms. We practice men are

dominant while women are subjugated. So, he wanted to show masculinity and manhood that he inherited from traditional social norms back home.

Bakkalcha Barii has been married for 32 years. Although he had less involvement in household chores responsibility sharing, he felt he has never dominated his wife to fulfill his only interest. He said, that is the reason of keeping the marriage for such long years. But as an older adult, he has got opportunities to meet and discuss with Ethiopian immigrant spouses which encountered problems. He explained his experience and the reality he had discovered as follows

If my wife and I have different ideas and interests and arguing on something, I first leave the room. Then I cool down and came back and discussed it with my wife in the absence of our children. If it seems for my own interest, she could not accept it, the same way with me. So, we put on wait the thing we argued on and if it adds value and we both convinced, we can implement it. Otherwise, we will reject it. I believe I never imposed or dictated my idea on my wife, which kept us together all these years.

On the contrary, what I have noticed with some families was different. Mostly husband wants to see his wife at home. He wanted she makes coffee and cooking like Ethiopia. I met a husband who believes his wife should not visit her friend. Some husbands did not want to see their wives open bank accounts or do something by their own. I feel that is not only subjugation; it is called "*garbummaa*," meaning slavery. That is how our women suffer from such high men's dominance ingrained norms.

Dhala Namaa also shared her experience of how her husband wanted to show his dominance because he was a husband:

Currently, I have been separated for two years. But before that, when I was married, my husband tried what he could do to keep me in the house. He wanted me only rearing

kids, cooking, and cleaning as we knew back home. He wanted *"mana keessaa taée akkan isa gammachiisu qofa barbaad"* meaning he wanted me to sit down and make him happy at home. I said no to his control. For instance, we bought a house, and because I have children and cannot afford to pay the mortgage and living costs, he threatened me that he wanted to move out if I did not accept his decision. In addition, I did not have the freedom to buy what I wanted to buy. He could create many reasons not to buy what I wanted. He could say we have that stuff and we do not need it; it is an unnecessary cost. So, I felt like *"wagga saddeet guutuu cunqursammaan ture,"* meaning I was under total subjugation or a kind of slavery for the entire eight years of marriage. I did not say all Ethiopian men are the same. But I feel my husband looks like he lives in Ethiopia.

The experience with Boru Baraqa was no different from other participants. He pointed out that

I studied in Canada. I am a social work professional. I could also understand and respect my wife's interest. I wanted her to think and decide independently as long as it helped us. I knew her decision always helped my family and me. However, the truth is, including me, it does not matter; where and what I studied, but this ingrained man dominance gender norm is not easily changed. I mediated marriage conflicts of our church members and from our community too. I observed that men do not want to lose the manhood power relationship that they have got by highly ingrained gender norms. Men could not explicitly say they wanted to show their masculinity to their wives. But I understood the big challenge is that most immigrant Ethiopian men wanted to dictate their wives and fulfill their interests before anything else.

During the semi-structured interview, the study participants shared their perspectives on the gender norms change of Ethiopian immigrants. This discussion revealed that men are more

dominant and subjugating women's rights. Hence, women could not even exercise a little of their rights although they lived in Canada. Instead, they are subject to male dominance ingrained gender norms. Therefore, men are perceived to be more masculine (manhood) as having control over women, threatening and imposing their interests on women, whereas women are perceived to be feminine, such as weaker, not making their own decisions but devoted to fulfilling men's interests (Kachel et al., 2016). In addition, immigrants from third-world countries can hold the traditional-oriented relationship because of ingrained socially constructed norms (Corley and Sabri, 2021). Thus, husbands have a high probability of retaining inherited oppressive behaviors over their partners (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019).

On the other hand, the qualitative data revealed that the Urjii Barii family had already embraced egalitarianism due to various reasons. From the story and the background of the participants, Boru Baraqa and Bakkalcha Barii have partly entertained the egalitarian gender relationship; therefore, in my perspective, the women in their families have not suffered compared to Lalistu Margaa and Dhala Namaa. However, it sounded like Lalistu Margaa and Dhala Namaa have been the victims of transnational manhood gender norms. Immigrant women's physical and mental health has been threatened by being in male-dominant gender norms relationships (Corley and Sabri 2021). We have noticed such health problems from Lalistu Margaa and Dhala Namaa. Women health are impacted in traditional relationship due to women are oppressed by male dominant norms (Falconier, 2013).

From her story, Lalistu Margaa has noticed she has some health problem since she walked on the snow for long hours in summer season shoes. She said her husband did not buy her a pair of snowshoes while she did not have access to pull money from the joint bank account they opened. Her experience does not reflect what happens in all Ethiopians homes. But the qualitative data and

the literature review indicate that transnational gender norms are highly prevalent among Ethiopian immigrants in Canada. So, the gender norms that Ethiopian immigrants bring from back home are very powerful and often subjugated the women. It is evident from the experiences highlighted that such gender norms harm spousal relationships.

#### **4.1.3. Women – most responsible person for protecting a family**

All participants have discussed that every family member is responsible for keeping the family together. They said if marriage is broken, all the family members, especially the children, are more vulnerable than the spouses. However, the contributions of women are tremendous in protecting the family. Boru Baraqa agreed that everyone's contribution is essential, but women are more important than men to keep the family relationship. He explained

Every family member is responsible for keeping the family relationship. Everyone has the responsibility to protect the children because the children are the most victims of marital conflict. That is why I always say husband and wife have to be patient. However, I felt women are more responsible and gifted to keep a relationship. I learned this when my wife went to Ethiopia just three months ago, in September 2021. She was there for one month. I cannot tell you how much we all suffered, especially the kids were traumatized. Women are very much gifted to maintain good relationships. However, the men must also not to be naïve or recognize and respect their wives ' interests and understand the burden.

Urijii Barii believes both men and women have equal responsibility to keep family relationships, marriage relationships, and protect the children. However, she said, she understood that Ethiopian immigrant men had expected more from women, even if she is working. She said

I recently sat a marital conflict mediation, even last month. The marriage was really about coming apart. One issue was the relationship. A man was compliant. He said she did not respect me. She did not welcome me when I came from work. He wanted his wife to

give him more comfort in the home. Because he said, I am the provider of sustenance for the family. What about her? She works outside too. After she comes home, she cleans, cooks, wash, takes care of the kids. But nobody thinks about her pain, and he said that she is responsible for keeping the family relationship. He said I do not want to come home when there is no happiness, no joy. Uh ... I am tired for her.

Although all the participants agreed that the mother role is the key to keeping the family relationship and protecting children, I was more impressed by how Dhala Namaa explained her commitment to protect her children. She indicated that

It looks like I was tied down like a horse because he knew I am very committed to my children. You know “*gammaadaan farad sakkaaluu*” meaning a horse is tied down by robe. He did like that to me. I am very committed to my children. So, I wanted to make my children happy. My husband wanted to be successful by making money. I brought these children to this world. I have to pay all prices to make them happy. My children are more than everything for me. “*Inniis akkan ijoollee toof gatii hunda kafalu hinbeeka kanaaf nacunqursaa.*” This means my husband knew I could pay every price for my children; that is why he oppressed/enabled me like that.

Currently, I live in a government house. After he did all those to me, I called him to live with me. Because my kids were again missed their dad. They suffered emotionally and psychologically. One day after their dad visited his children, I remembered that my son was crying and ran to him when his dad left. Oh my God. The car was about to hit my son, precisely near miss. Then I felt pain again. So, I bear all those pains and decided to call him back to live with us. I, myself, called him and discussed it with him. I asked him if he was changed, only to protect the children by being with them. He said, okay, it is

suitable for my children. Now, he understood that I could kick him out anytime. He learned I could survive and live without him. So, I do not want my children to be traumatized because their parents are divorced. Hence, I forgot everything he did to me and started living with him for a while.

However, for Bakkalcha Bari, marriage relationship and protecting children is all about the purpose of making a family. He said, if the goal of a husband and wife is to have a good family and protect the children from mental and physical harm, the spouses show their commitment to protect the marriage. Otherwise, you cannot keep the family relationship by making the women responsible. He spoke

First, when I talk about marriage, we need to see that marriage, in principle, is a union of two people, in our case, woman and man, with the same goal. There may have different ideas, but their goal must be the same. Two people united as one person with a mission to live together, help each other, raise children. That is how I understand marriage because after they get married, the child will come soon.

When I got into disputes with my wife, the first thing that I noticed here was that we should think for our family and children than us. I guess my wife also feels the same way too. Do you think other people are ready to take responsibility and sacrifice for our children? When we answer this question, the issues of family relationships have already been solved. I am not undermining a woman's role; obviously, my wife's role is uncountable, but the husbands should have to be very helpful to protect the family. I can assure you my wife and I had so many disputes, but no one mediated us for one moment in the 32 years of our marriage life.

However, some men did not have such commitment and smartness in a relationship.

I mediated many marriage conflicts. But I have observed that most Ethiopian immigrant men want their wives to take all responsibility to protect the family relationships while he is a dictator.

The qualitative data collected illustrated that almost all the participants argued that women play an essential role in keeping good relationships in the family. However, men's role is also equally important. Some participants noted that women take more responsibility to protect their children because if the marriage is terminated, the children are the most victims of the family members. Furthermore, the literature review suggests that divorce has diminished the children's development, including social, relationship, education, and emotional wellbeing (Anderson 2014). The literature also suggests that women assume more accountability for family and children care than men, even in western developed countries (Van de Vijver 2007). I shared the concern and commitment of Dhala Namaa that she has been a highly dedicated woman for her children. Sagacious Oromo metaphor said, "*Saani ilmoo ishiitii jetee waraanamte.*" This means a cow is stabbed for her baby. Again, because this researcher only depends on a semi-structured interview, I am super cautious about summarizing that such behavior can represent all Ethiopian immigrants. However, it indicates traditional-oriented gender norms are highly prevalent among the study group, and women felt more responsible than men to keep family relationships and protect the children. On the contrary, men feel less responsible for doing house chores and maintaining good relationships in the family, which creates marital conflicts. Therefore, the probability of marital instability and divorce is very high.



## **4.2. Factors perpetuating traditional oriented gender norms**

### **4.2.1. Men's attitudes and skills**

During data collection, participants discussed men's attitudes and skills as factors that perpetuate the male dominance gender norms. All participants understood that men's attitudes and skills facilitate gender norms change to egalitarian-oriented or influence the families to hold a traditional-oriented relationship. Lalistu Margaa underline the men attitude is the number one factor perpetuating male dominance relationship. She indicated that

You understand that Ethiopian immigrant men mostly have no skills of cooking, cleaning, and even changing the children's diapers; of course, they can learn the skills. But my ex-husband had no interest at all. He did not have skills and interests. He also believes that all household chores are women's responsibilities. So, he does not want to be changed at all.

Similarly, Dhala Namaa explained that

My husband did not do house chores. I do not know if he does not believe in it or is ill-equipped. But I said ill-equipped because he did not want me to work paid jobs. He did not do anything, even the easiest work. I knew he had no cooking skills, but organizing stuff and dishwashing did not require skills, only interest, and good attitudes. So, he has no interest in helping me. He believes homework are all but my responsibility. Who said so?

Boru Baraqa believes men have to take household responsibilities-sharing. But he pointed out that the gender related norms acquired in Ethiopia are deeply embedded in some immigrant men. He said

Our background cultural influence is enormous. I can say we could not change overnight because that is an attitude. I do not want to refer only to culture; also, I have no

skills. But, of course, there are better opportunities to learn cooking skills to do house chores. I understand I have to learn. It is all about attitude and change.

Likewise, Bakkalcha Barii also believes that the background social norm is very big in influencing the husband's attitude. He said

We grew in that male-dominant culture. We were told those responsibilities are hundred percent female responsibilities. Some people adapt and settle very fast, learn Canadian culture, do house chores, and help their families. But everything depends on men's commitment to change is attitudes. If he is ill-equipped, he continues with traditional gender norms. Men also do not have the skills in cooking as women want.

For Urjii Barii, the meaning of men's sharing in household chores-responsibilities is beyond helping the women and the families. She said it is not only about an attitudinal change. Instead, it is a revolution, even the most significant revolution of men being independent from women. She said men's household chores responsibility sharing is an attitude of liberation from a woman. She explained

I understand Ethiopian Immigrant men's attitudes perpetuate male dominance gender norms. However, listen, my husband was a political liberation struggler. He believes the first and for most liberation is men's liberation from the dependence of women. People consider a husband not doing house chores burdened on the wife. Men not doing house chores is not only an attitude of perpetuating traditional-oriented gender norms. But it is also an attitude of men's dependence on women. So, my husband cooked because he did not want to depend on women for eating. Our men lack such motivational attitudes. That is the reason for male dominance gender norms. So, men are also the number one victim as well. We are a kind of victimizing each other.

The qualitative data illustrated that all the participants unanimously agreed that men's attitudes and lack of skills perpetuating traditional gender norms in spousal relationship among Ethiopian immigrants. However, except for Urjii Bari, the other four participants described that the male dominance gender norms are either related to background social norms or men have no skill and not ready to learn or both.

A majority of the literatures related men's dominance gender norms with men's attitudes, which is highly manipulated by the countries of origin cultural background. The second factor is men's skills to do household chores. Immigrant men with tradition-oriented relationship have the attitude of unwillingness to help women in the house because of cultural backgrounds (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019, p., 590). In addition, even though immigrant men have exposure to non-immigrant attitudes and practices, the existing traditional norms could negatively impact the effectiveness of adaptation to egalitarian gender relationships (Pessin and Arpino 2018). Corley and Sabri (2021) claimed that African immigrant women are the subject of gender-based violence perpetrated by intimate partners in developed countries because of background cultural norms.

However, none of the literature discussed the idea of Urjii Bari, i.e., men's attitude of doing house chores is an act of independence from women. In my perspective, I believe men doing house chores is the first action man liberates himself from women's dependence. On the contrary, men not taking homework responsibility indicates men's helpless behaviour to cook the daily food to eat, clean the house to live in, etc., which I think is absolute dependency. Overall, the qualitative data and the literature review summarizes men's attitudes and skills of household chores responsibility-sharing perpetuate male dominance gender norms, which negatively impact marital relationships and cause conflicts.

#### **4.2.2. Women's internalized oppression**

During the semi-structured interviews, participants described that women's internalized oppression is the second factor for male dominance gender norms. Immigrant Ethiopian women have believed and made doing housework part of their self-image due to deeply ingrained oppressive male dominance culture. For instance, Lalistu Margaa explained that she did not want her ex-husband to do household chores unless she was at the workplace. She indicated that

I did not ask my ex-husband to do house chores because I grew up in a male-dominant culture. For example, in Ethiopia, if you did not pick my dad's plate as soon as he finished eating, he could throw the plate at you. That attitude is still in my mind. So, I did not want my husband to help me in the kitchen. Even today, I am not happy if my husband helps me in the kitchen unless I am at work. I believe in responsibility sharing. But the culture we bring to Canada influenced me not to exercise my right. Also, I loved doing house chores more than when my ex-husband did it because he could not do it right. Sometimes, I ask myself, may I even apparently be oppressing myself. That is my experience.

Bakkalcha Barii also shared the same experiences with Lalistu Margaa. He said if they have guests in their house, his wife wanted him to walk away from the kitchen because it is shameful for his wife and himself too. He explained as follows:

Let's say it's a weekend, or we have an event organized or kind of party, in our home, my wife did not want me to help her at that busy time. No, she does not want me even to wash the dishes. She can say walk away from me may be due to two reasons: one, it is shameful for her and for me too if someone saw me in the kitchen, and the second, she is not satisfied with what I am doing because she has skills. Also, she loves doing house

chores. In addition, our women loved it doing more than we men do. Actually, they love it because they feel that is their femininity imposed on them by culture, and the second we can mess up things when men cook or do house chores. However, we cannot deny that eventually, women are overburdened.

However, Boru Baraqa said his wife would be happy if her husband shared responsibilities, but she did not ask him to do. At the same time, if he participated in cooking, she could not ask him to leave the kitchen. However, he said, we divided activities at home. He explained that “I take responsibility for helping children with education and the like while my wife cooks, cleans, and dishwashing things.” But still, it is a gender-based division. He further explained as follows:

For instance, let me give you my own example; considering children like documentation, education, or other related to children's schooling are my responsibilities. My wife does not give attention to children schooling things even if she can do it, not because of shortage of time but because she thinks those are my responsibilities. I do laundry and those kinds of stuff as well. But cooking and around the kitchen area, my wife does those things. If I work in the kitchen, none of us feel ashamed. No, I do not feel shame; I rather may be happy. But the norms and skills restricted me, as I said.

Dhala Namaa's experience is different from other participants. She always asked her husband to do house chores, whether she was at home or work. But he said no. She said,

I was a full-time employee and sometimes worked up to 16 hours. When I came home, I am already tired. So, I wanted him to help me. I wanted to rest because I had to go to work the next day. Who could help me when my partner said no? So, I asked him to learn the skills and do house chores, but he said that was only my responsibility. Uh... that is really insane.

Urjii Barii agreed with other participants that women are the victim of internalized oppression to men's dominance gender norms. The implication of women's internalized oppression demonstrated the layer of traditional gender norms among the immigrant community. She argued that women indirectly perpetuated traditional male norms because of the deeply ingrained male-dominant norms. Urjii Barii provide her insight in such a way:

When it is a culture for men, also it is a culture for women. It is a culture for children and everybody too. When the culture goes that deep, it keeps the women down. You see, women participated in that culture and kept themselves down. This is the kind of challenge we have encountered. It is not only men who oppress the women, but also a woman because of internalized oppression she involved in their oppression. The woman felt ashamed because she saw her husband in the kitchen; that is absolute inferiority. Hence, that showed the deeply internalized oppression.

The qualitative data revealed that women believe doing house chores is part of their deeply ingrained gender norms. For example, Lalistu Margaa did not want to see her husband in the kitchen. At the same time, Bakkalcha Barii's wife also felt ashamed if a visitor saw her husband in the kitchen. On the contrary, Dhala Namaa wanted her husband's help, although she did not get the needed support from him.

The literature review claimed that due to the male-dominated oppression over a long period of time, "women might hold and perpetuate self-defeating beliefs and customs" (Fook 2016, p., 17). Researchers also discussed that women take more responsibility for household chores than men even in egalitarian gender norms host country. Immigrant African women take almost all house chores and childcare responsibilities even in western developed countries because they believe housework is their primary responsibility (Van de Vijver 2007, Connor et al. 2016). Gilbert

(1994) also asserted that both women and men inherited the background culture while women even believe in engaging more in housework. However, I am super cautious about concluding that immigrant Ethiopian women perpetuate the men's dominant gender norms. But, it is safer to summarize that women could internalize oppression and make it part of their lives because of deeply ingrained transnational traditional gender norms.

But none of the literature reviewed suggested women did not want their husbands to work in the kitchen. Instead, the literature indicated that men from traditional gender norms cultural backgrounds have no willingness to share household chores responsibilities which cause marital conflicts between husband and wife.

#### **4.2.3. Community role**

During the semi-structured interview, participants pointed out that the immigrant community could significantly perpetuate traditionally oriented gender norms. All the participants had agreed that traditional gender norms are powerful in creating shame or guilt for both spouses when it comes to the community they belong. It also has created pride for the men that his wife agreed to do only household chores by quitting their paid jobs. Dhala Namaa said that her husband always shared the experience of a friend with whom his wife agreed to take care of children, cook and clean only. She explained that

He has always discussed his friends' wives who say okay to their husbands whatever their men asked them. When you say no to his interest, the community member could sometimes talk about you like gossip, creating shame on you. Then you feel distracted. So, you feel shame and afraid to protect your rights when you are violated. But, if the husband attacks the woman, including beating her up, the community members appreciate him. I am not saying all community members, but some say he shut up her mouth, he is a hero,

the like. You know some women have been beaten up but not reported to the service provided for various reasons. Technically, the community members must discourage such action; otherwise, it could be a bad model for abusive husbands.

Boru Baraqa said someone he knew warned him when he came to Canada. He said his friend told him to be aware of three Ws in Canada. He explained, "the three Ws my friend advised me to be careful of are work, weather, and the third one is women. This sounds like a joke, but it implies a lack of a good relationship between immigrant couples". Such kinds of narratives are very powerful in creating shame and guilt for women. Could you imagine what it means to compare Canadian weather with women's and warn African men who came from the hottest continent of the world? Because Canadian weather needs wearing winter clothes, for example, in the snow time, otherwise it hurts. Comparing a woman with such weather conditions implies the absence of trust between couples, and it really emphasize shame.

The experience of Urjii Barii explicitly demonstrated the community's role in perpetuating the male dominance gender norms in Canada. Urjii Barii said her husband is an egalitarian-oriented man, and he cooks more delicious food than her, but the pressure was from the community members. She said, she was studying for her Ph.D. at the University of Toronto some years back, and it was a very tense time with assignments and papers to be submitted. As a result, she had to study in the library. Her husband was a political liberation struggle leader. So, there was a meeting organized for community members. Then the dinner was to be at Urjii Barri's home. She explained the rest of the story as follows

As I said, the dinner was arranged at my house. My husband cooked and served all the participants. The participants were women, men, religious leaders, Shiekh, church leaders from all types of community groups. When I came home, they all were happily



discussing and laughing. I greeted everybody and sat down. My husband served me. But when my husband served me jaw-dropping, eye-popping, they were all ashamed on his behalf. I had no problem I ate; my husband took my dishes and washed.

So, by the time they were leaving, they called me. I thought the community members were going to tell me bad news, like someone hurt or died. But they said to me, what is wrong with you? We thought of him as our leader, an honorable leader. *“Waaqayoon hinsodaattuu! Hingabroomafte.”* Meaning, do not you have a fear of God? You enslaved him. Why do you make that shameful to him?

Then I said, hmm.... WOW! So, is that okay when I am enslaved if cooking is enslavement? If it is not okay for men to be enslaved, is it okay for women? It was really frustrating. So, we were okay with the chores we were taking; we were responsible for everything. We didn't have any problems. But the pressure came from community elders, the church elders, Sheikhs, and priests. That was the pressure we had from the community. As I said repeatedly, the culture is very ingrained and continues even today; even last month, I noticed the same thing when I attended the marital conflict mediation.

Urjii Barii said such kind of pressure continues with the young generation. She indicated that her experience was about 15 years ago, but such practice exists in the community at the present time too.

The participants' experiences demonstrated that traditional gender norms have strong power to create shame and guilt for the women who fight for their rights. On the contrary, the immigrant society encourages abusive men's actions, which perpetuates the men's dominant gender norms in the Ethiopian community. Therefore, the oppressed women loss strength to stand with the pressure from the community members and report to the mainstream service providers like the

police (Okeke- Ihejirika et al., 2019). Whenever they escape the community norms and mediations to look for justice, they are blamed and experience backlash, which is part of the stigmatization (Boyle and Ali 2009).

Urjii Bari's experience is a notable example of how the community member can pressure a family and discourages women who have struggled to embrace egalitarian-oriented relationships. Such narratives like "enslaving the husband" are strong to create shame for women and perpetuating male dominance norms. However, I feel women can go for their rights when they are abused because they have better protections in Canada than in Ethiopia.

Overall, the Ethiopian immigrant women could exercise the newfound egalitarian relationships, while the husband might not entertain the women's demands, creating tension between husbands and wives and impacting the marriage.

### **4.3. Women emancipation and immigrant marriage**

This section of the chapter presents the finding and discussion of the research participants' perspectives of women's emancipation on immigrant marriages. The first sub-section discusses women's consciousness raising on spouses' relationships. The second sub-section presents the impact of education, and the third sub-section employment. Finally, the fourth sub-section explores the discourse on women's earnings and decision making on marriage.

#### **4.3.1. Women's consciousness raising**

One-on-one study participants discussed that the Ethiopian immigrant women have more access to information about women's rights and protections in Canada than Ethiopia. As well, participants discussed the roles of media, community members, English language skills training centers, and schools played a significant role in awareness-raising. In addition, service providers, including housing services agencies, legal councils, and police officers, play a pivotal role in

raising the consciousness of immigrant women. As a result, women have enough information on women's protection and services which might not be positively acknowledged, especially by abusive husbands.

Bakkalcha Barii explained that while Ethiopian immigrant women are confidently aware of those service providers, abusive Ethiopian men are intimidated because those services are readily available at any time to offer protection for the women. Bakkalcha Barii, who has been closely mediating the couples' conflict, explained

Women have access to information, and women can learn from each other, consult people and raise the question of why my husband does not help me. The husband might want to continue being abusive and oppressive in Canada. In that case, women say I do not want him to think like Ethiopia and apply that oppression on me. She might say, I believe in Canada my rights have been respected. She even knew where to call how to consult legal counsel. Oh ... God! Those legal counsels and police officers have already provided information to the woman and the service they can offer her. You see, those pieces of information are the power for the women but impacted marriage because men would not like to entertain as they came from traditional oriented norms.

Lalistu Margaa and Dhala Namaa also explained that their husbands did not want them to contact the service provider because they were abusive. I summarized both women's ideas in such a way. They explained

Our husbands think we can report what they have done to us. Our men also might think we can get more information if we go to the police, our friends, etc. But we already have enough information about our rights and protection. That is the reason why our husbands are shaking when we say a word about protection.

Similarly, Urjii Barii and Boru Baraqa agreed with the other three participants that immigrant women have gotten much more information in Canada than in Ethiopia. They said, "women had gotten enough information because they went through a lengthy immigration process, orientation, contacted their friends and different service providers in Canada."

The literature review revealed that immigrant women have better access to resources and information in host countries than in the country of origin. For example, Connor et al. (2016) noted that Somali immigrant women have better access to consciousness-raising information on women's rights and protection in USA. In addition, immigrant African women's exposure to women's rights discourse (Boyle and Ali 2009), socializing with friends and community support groups, and going grocery shopping (Connor et al. 2016) increase their consciousness.

The qualitative data and literature review revealed different mechanisms through which women can get access to information about their rights and protections. The participants in their discussion noted that access to information increases women's consciousness to seek services. In the semi-structured interview discussion, the participants indicated that women knew whom to contact for what kind of specific services; for instance, every woman knew 911. Hence, those services give more power to women, and the foundation for gender norms change but threaten abusive husbands, thereby creating marital conflicts.

#### **4.3.2. Women's education**

Participants noted that education could play a significant role in empowering the women's status in the family. They also said women's opportunities to access education have increased in Canada compared to Ethiopia. However, most Ethiopian immigrant women's education level is very low due to family responsibilities.

Dhala Namaa said that she did not go to school because she must work to help her family, especially her mother. Lalistu Margaa also explained that even though she has got the opportunity in Canada, she did not go to post-secondary education. She explained the reason as follows

I did not go to school in the first place because you know when you have a child, you have to work to cover the living costs. I did not discuss about education with my ex-husband as well. But I was attending English language skills training. My husband only wanted me to work at home. He was not happy, and he was looking for a reason to stop me from English language skills training school.

But I believe that I could find a better job if my English skills are improved. I wanted to be independent from my husband. I believe education is power, although I did not grab the opportunity. But I attended at least English skills training not to be dependent on my husband entirely.

Bakkalcha Bariii also said his wife did not go to post-secondary school. He said that after they came to Canada, his wife got pregnant. Then she quit education. Then in two years, the second child came. So, he said she did not go back to school after that, and she was not working until our children became older. However, he said some Ethiopian immigrant women study and change their lives, like finding better jobs. He described that undoubtedly, education is empowerment to women. But there are two types of husbands: who help their wives attend education and who do not.

Boru Baraqa also explained that while his wife helped him to attend tertiary education, she did not attend post-secondary education. She only attended personal support work. He shared the reason for his wife not attending post-secondary as follows

I was older than my wife. I grabbed the opportunity to attend post-secondary education in this country. She was working when I was a student. After I finished my education, I encouraged her to attend a personal support worker program. However, unlike men, women have limited opportunities to attend post-secondary education, especially after having children. Because the family responsibility loads are mainly on her shoulder. To be honest, if she was not taking care of all those responsibilities, I could not attend education.

The above four participants discussed that women did not mostly attend post-secondary education because they took on more family responsibilities, especially after having a child. Instead, they tend to attend English skill improvement training or other short courses like personal support work training to find a lower-skills job. I have discussed with Urjii Barii about the experience of Ethiopian immigrant women's post-secondary education participation. She said Ethiopian immigrant women's education is mostly limited to high school, English skill training, and other lower skill trainings like six months to one-year short courses. The reasons could be first because they have more responsibility in the family; second, her husband does not want his wife above him in education. Urjii Barii indicated that

I told you that women are more responsible in the family. That is the first reason for women's low education level. The other is that her husband did not want her to attend post-secondary education. I mediated martial conflict just last month. The man believed he was not as educated as she was. She is more educated, and he feels inferior. She is more educated. He does not want her to get any more education because that would intimidate him more. Education empowers a woman. But he wanted to top the power of the family that might come from our culture. Traditionally, the husband is more powerful than woman

in the relationship. So, that could be one reason for the low education level of Ethiopian immigrant women.

The literature review illustrated that the root cause of gender inequality in third-world countries is fewer education opportunities for women and girls (Jayachandran 2015). However, women's post-secondary education participation is one of the factors for the immigrant family to adapt to egalitarian relationships in the host country (Van de Vijver, 2007). Education opportunities, including English skills training, help immigrant women to access services, including the legal system and other social services, by themselves (Gerber 2020). Furthermore, Boyle and Ali (2016) noted that educated immigrant women are less likely to be threatened by their partners.

On the contrary, the qualitative data on my study demonstrated that Ethiopian immigrant women still have lower education levels in Canada. The reasons are high family responsibility and transnational gender norms, even though they have better opportunities in western developed countries (Okeke-Ihejirika et al. 2018, Connor et al. 2016). Therefore, we can summarize that while education empowers women to adapt egalitarian-oriented relationships, Ethiopian immigrant women could not exploit and utilize the education opportunities in Canada. Furthermore, family responsibility and traditional background gender norms from Ethiopia are the primary factors for Ethiopian immigrant women's lower participation in post-secondary education. Finally, we can conclude that there is a high probability of change to egalitarian family relationships with the increasing women's education level. But as illustrated in the finding, education causes marital conflicts among Ethiopian immigrant spouses due to traditional-oriented relationships.

### 4.3.3. Employment

During the one-on-one semi-structured interviews, the study participants explained that women in Canada have better opportunities to find a job than in Ethiopia. They said many immigrant women are working to help their families economically. Boru Baraqa explained the experience he has noticed in Canada:

After they came to Canada, women are working in the factory or wherever. It is an obligation, not an optional, for women to work outside. Because the money husband makes might not be enough. The other reason is that women have their own interests. So, employment is not only the source of income for women. But also, it is an empowerment and psychological satisfaction even having their own bank account.

Lalistu Margaa further explained that employment is not about money. It is about changing something that might have control over you. She shared her experiences

I told you my husband, and I opened a joint bank account, but I could not access the money. Because I did not know what to do, I did not speak English. You see, everything is connected. Ironically, he considered me like an incapable woman. Then I decided to change that situation. I finished English skill training. So, I had to take any job and help my family and myself. Now, thank God I am a full-time employee. For me, employment is not only about getting money but about changing something. Uh ... or winning oppression, winning subjugation, in my case. I said in my case because other Ethiopian immigrant men might not be like my ex-husband.

Dhala Namaa shared the idea that a woman must work in Canada. She said if women did not work, she decided to "*mirga ishii dabarsitee kenuu*" meaning she handed over her rights to someone to control her. Dhala Namaa explained her idea as follows



Unemployed women in this country have two options: one to be dependent on welfare support and the second to wait for her husband's hand to give her money for subsistence. But unfortunately, she cannot afford the living cost in both ways, so if she does not work, she has to make herself ready to forget her interest and live only to fulfill her husband's interest.

Bakkalcha Barii has agreed with both women: Dhala Namaa and Lalistu Margaa. He said employment for immigrant Ethiopian women in this country is a necessity.

Many Ethiopian immigrant women are employees in this country. But men do not like that because they want to see their wives at home when they come home from work. However, women could not accept it. So, women's employment is more than making money. I can say no woman wants to work only at home in this country unless she has a child or other reasons, like health problems.

Urjii Barii also provided insight into Ethiopian immigrant women in Canada. She explained

I told you women's education and employment are linked. Women want to participate in paid jobs because they want to be independent. Educated women can find better jobs with better positions, which might intimidate their husbands. She could find a better job than him. Traditionally, a man should be given the utmost respect in the family. But If his wife is employed, he might not have that respect. That is the problem. I know Ethiopian immigrant women take even lower-level skills jobs because they want to be independent from men.

The qualitative data illustrated that Ethiopian immigrant women consider lower-level skills jobs because they want to help their families and themselves. They think it is a new opportunity as they might have a chance to find a job in Ethiopia. The literature review also pointed out that

immigrant women have better access to the labour force and paid jobs in host countries. Gerber (2020) noted that Immigrant women have a lesser opportunity of finding a job in their country of origin than their country of destination. In addition, Immigrant African women are more open to being recruited in low-skills jobs than men because of economic needs (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019). They believe paid jobs are a newfound opportunity that gives them more freedom than working at home (Connor et al., 2016, Boyle and Ali, 2016). Furthermore, Van de Vijver (2007) claimed that women's employment status is one of the best indicators of egalitarian-oriented family relationships. However, women's employment does not always lead to gender equality. Because women are more responsible for doing household chores, men have more job opportunities and they are still perceived as breadwinners (Connor et al. 2016, Okeke-Ihejirika et al. 2018).

Hence, Ethiopian immigrant women are motivated to participate in paid jobs due to economic factors, newfound opportunity, do not want only to work at home, and believe employment gives them more freedom. On the other hand, women's employment could trigger marital disputes if the male partners do not want women to participate in paid jobs. Divorced women Lalistu Margaa and separated women Dhala Namaa also claimed that their participation in paid jobs were the first cause of the conflict with their partners for two reasons. Firstly, their husbands want to quit paid jobs and only work at home, and secondly, the financial earnings make the women more independent from men. Women's participation in paid jobs might trigger marital conflict and create marriage instability depending on the attitude of the spouses.

#### **4.3.4. Earning and decision making**

The findings from semi-structured interviews links the immediate consequences of women's employment with women's access to income and earnings. Women making money or having increased earnings increases the contribution to the household economy. Dhala Namaa

agreed that women must make money in Canada to help themselves and their family. She said the contribution women make in the family makes their voice heard. Dhala Namaa talked about her experience of making money and decision making as follows.

In Ethiopia, women mostly do not have money. "*harka dhiiraa eeggati*". Meaning she is looking or waiting for a man's hand and depends on how much money he could give her. She has to accept the money he gave her and manage it to buy basic stuff for the house. Similarly, my husband wanted to dictate my decision like that. For example, if he gave me some money, he said, you have to do this, or you cannot do this. But I do not accept that. I want to buy jewelry or help my mom in Ethiopia. When you make money, you can decide for yourself, and he should know you could survive without him. With the money you make you can argue to change his decision, or if not, you can go with your interest. There could be a dispute, but he cannot change it because that money is yours.

Bakkalcha Barii shared the idea of Dhala Namaa. He said when a woman has regular earnings, she wants to decide not only on her money but also on her husband's money because she feels she is contributing. He indicated that

I have no problem with my wife. I told you I had been married for 32 years. We have trust not only in money but on other issues. So, we had no problem with that, certainly one of the secrets for keeping this marriage alive. But I saw some Ethiopian immigrant families struggle with women's earnings and decision-making. I have mediated many marital conflicts, as I said. Women make money and decide not only on their accounts but also on their husbands' accounts. That is the existing reality. She wants to control her husband's spending or be consulted when he spends. For example, I remember a husband who opened a secret bank account that his wife did not know. But at some point, she

discovered her husband had a separate bank account. That was the cause of big conflict because the women wanted to decide based on the contribution to the families' economy. It is also related to the newfound gender rights in this country. But if a husband does not accept, the marriage can never be stable, or there could be conflicts.

Boru Baraqa has shared his own experiences and problems he has noticed among other Ethiopian Immigrants while mediating marital conflict. He explained

First of all, I do not have such family problems with financial matters decision making with my wife. I mean, when I said no problems, we have overcome those problems. Considering making money, my income is as twice as my wife's income, but I do not say I can make all decisions. Instead, we have divided which expenses she could cover and which one I should. So, she covers consumption costs. The rest I can cover is for our family. The money we make is for all of us, not only my money, not only her money.

We had some conflicts on whom we should help regarding helping our families. Everybody in Ethiopia understands that we send them money or support them because we live in Canada, but we cannot. So, we had a conflict on these related issues. But after some time, we brought such issues to the table, and both of us decided to help only our respective mothers. So, she can send money for her mother. I can also send money to my mother and her mother too. In addition, we can help people whom we agreed on, including children's school support. If our relatives are sick and face a shortage of money to get medical treatment, we can also help them. However, we have decided that all together.

Boru Baraqa also shared insights gained from mediating issues between other spouses. He said that women's earnings and decision-making go side by side. In Canada, women can make money if they want, and they have newfound rights also. However, men would not acknowledge

those changes. These gender norms change because the women are in Canada. We have to accept those changes. If not, there is a high possibility of marital conflict.

The experience of Lalistu Margaa was also the same before she was divorced from her first husband. She said I tolerated the household responsibility-sharing and other related disputes. But I could not tolerate him when he wanted to make decisions regarding everything about my life. Lalistu Margaa further explained her experience and viewpoint as follows

My husband wanted to decide even on the money we got from welfare. The welfare money should go to my daughter and me. As a matter of fact, welfare money was for children and women. I learned these all lately. I have to access that money and take care of my daughter. Listen, he did not take care of my daughter, but he used the financial support came for her. Because he had an ATM, we did not access the money. I could not do anything.

After sometimes my dad was detained in Ethiopia for political reasons in 2017. I heard my dad was seriously sick gastric while he was in jail. Then I asked him to give me 100 dollars to send to my dad. He said no. I cannot forget it; he said to me, "I did not come to send the money for your dad/family." That was ridiculous when my dad needed help from me. I gave him an ultimatum I can call the police. He said you can. He did not think I can call the police. I called the police. The police told him you could not do that to her. He said sorry, I did not know that. Then he called the community members. The community members told the police they could solve the problem. The police said, okay. Then they opened a separate bank account for me. He did not think I could call the police. But I had tolerated him enough. After that day, our relationship was further poisoned. Even though

it was not the money I made, I must access and decide on it. That was my experience in short.

Urjii Barii said that women's earnings are a significant achievement that questioned the "men breadwinner and women homemaker" thinking. That is big power shift in the family. She said

The increase in a woman's earnings affects her partner's power, decision-making, and utmost respect. On the one hand, I see those power shifts in the family, and on the other hand, a husband struggles to make his power up by bringing in more money. So those are the cause of marital conflicts among Ethiopian immigrants.

The literature review revealed that, due to low income and earnings, women in third-world countries are less likely to influence the spending decisions of the family (Jayachandran 2015). In addition, African women spend more time on house chores, limiting paid jobs working hours, decreasing their earnings; thus, men produce more and serve as a breadwinner (Akanle and Adesina 2016). However, with the increased immigrant women's earnings due to education and employment, women are empowered to negotiate family matters. High education and employment opportunities are for women often translated into better earnings in the economic realm to dictate the decision-making in the family (Schober and Scott 2012).

The qualitative data also revealed that Ethiopian immigrant women were empowered by earnings (government support and income) and newfound freedom. Thus, they have forced their partners to make a shared decision on resource management and money spending. Such a shift in power is not purely a cultural piece but a paradigm shift questioning the socially constructed and profoundly ingrained gender norms. Gerber (2020) states that immigrant women have a high probability of making higher money and increasing their contribution to the family income in host

countries that shift the power relationship dynamics in the family, similar to the non-immigrant families.

On the contrary, as the qualitative data demonstrates, Ethiopian immigrant men might not welcome women's empowerment and decision-making power. From the data, I have noticed that Lalistu Margaa's ex-husband had difficulty accepting such a power shift, which contributes to the couple's conflict. Similarly, Dhala Namaa's husband struggled to acknowledge his wife's earnings and the new culture that influenced decision-making power. Therefore, in sum increase in women's earnings and a shift in decision-making can create marital conflicts when spouses are not able to adapt to such changes and shifts in decision making power.

#### **4.4. Gender norms change and divorce**

The qualitative data demonstrated that change in sharing household chores responsibility and women empowerment are factors for marital conflict. For example, participants indicated that discussing issues related to household chores could increase couples' tension between spouses and lead to conflict because the husbands might not entertain such practices. Similarly, women empowerment and emancipation, i.e., education, employment, and income, are new gender norms that Ethiopian immigrants' spouses have been challenged with. Therefore, the effects of changes in gender norms on divorce are presented under this sub-topic.

In the in-depth interviews, the participants discussed how conflicts related to gender norms change could lead to marriage terminations. For instance, Bakkalcha Barii discussed the connection between changing gender norms and spouses' relationship break up. He said

In Canada, if a man does not respect gender norms changes, he fuels the conflict in his marriage. I am not saying you have to be changed at once, but you have to be ready mentally and psychologically for pressures due to gender norms change. Because gender

norms are all about respecting women's interests, i.e., helping and entertaining her idea in decision making. For example, in Ethiopia, when women are in their last one to two weeks of pregnancy, you could take them back to their mothers, or you may have a servant at home, or you might get support from neighbors or siblings. You only play a resource provider role. But in this country, you do not have all those supports. So, when the new baby comes, the husband must take all house-chores responsibilities and respect her decision. You must cook, clean, do laundry, take care of kids as well as be transparent in spending money.

Currently, my youngest daughter is 20. I went through those challenges. I have a happy family. Even my children say you; our parents are our role models. We want to be like you. But, if you are not ready to take responsibility and manage the resources transparently, you provoke conflict. It is as simple as that. Marital conflicts that happen when women are confined when new baby come have a high probability of ending in divorce in the long run. Because woman thinks she is oppressed or subjugated.

However, if you helped your wife, entertaining her decision, being transparent in resource management, you have been reciprocated by love, respect, and joyful family life from wife. You have been there for your wife and the newborn baby at a very critical time. Unfortunately, I have seen Ethiopian immigrant men who did not go with such changes, resulting in divorce.

Dhala Namaa also shared her experiences regarding spouses and how they share household responsibilities. For Dhala Namaa, she separated from her husband because he did not do house chores and did not respect her decisions. She elaborated her feeling and experiences as follows



Uh.... Thank God. Finally, I am free from that bad situation of my life. But, let me tell you, the first thing that still blew up my mind was the conflict we had. The factors are two: he was not taking responsibility to feed children, cook, clean, arrange the messed-up house. The second main cause was not entertaining my ideas when we had agenda items to be discussed. Our children were traumatized seeing our everyday conflicts. They were emotionally and psychologically victims at that age.

Listen, the money he made was not enough for us. Thus, I should work. I worked full-time the night shift. Every night my children asked me, are you working today? Are you going to work today? When can you spend the night with us? When I came home, I had to cook, feed my children, arrange the house. He also worked eight hours same as I did. But he did not want to do homework, never. So, we were in conflict multiple times. In addition, when I wanted to do something, he was always against my interest. Normally, I cannot believe I am his wife to fulfill only his interest. No. Some women might do that, but it does not work for me. So, I decided not to continue that way and finally separated.

Boru Baraqa said he had mediated many marital conflicts. He noticed that gender norms change is a significant factor for marital instability and even divorce. He indicated

Well, the cause of conflict, mainly if you ask me, is gender norms changes. I said the women have gotten the newfound power, but the men do not want to lose the power given to him by culture. Men can not explicitly say I do not give up my power. I am working in a church and a committee member in the community. Home chores workload is all but on women, which causes marital conflict most of the time. This is a big problem, especially the absence of extended family members has immense pressure even on marriage.

I am not pointing directly to husbands only, but our norms make us victims. For instance, after we come home from work, women are expected to cook, but the husband sits and watches TV. A woman might ask her husband for help. If he says no, that can cause conflict. In addition, as I said, when decision matters come, men do not want to compromise, same with women. If they do not compromise, big problems happen. Multiple conflict between spouses can lead to divorce. It is better to be divorced instead of always conflict. I like that. So, gender norm change is always there to trigger a conflict that might result in marriage terminations.

The other participant Lalistu Margaa also shared her lived experiences with her ex-husband. She explained her experience as follows

I only do all homework. I plan my time. I cooked what I needed to cook in my spare time and put it in the refrigerator. Similarly, I am cleaning my house, dishwashing, and others too. I was working those house chores. But my husband sat and waited for something to eat when I was doing all those chores. When I was home, I did not ask him and even not angry at him.

But when I was tired and came home from work, the house was messed up again. So, I could be angry. Listen, I was working what he was supposed to do according to our norms. Because I am changed and making money for our living. So, why he could not be changed and do home chores. That is really annoying. Because he was supposed to clean the house at least or arrange stuff.

I told you about I did not access money. So, I decided to stop him from oppressing me. Then I called the police as I said. So, a new bank account was opened by my name with the help of police and the community members. Finally, I started work. I showed him

I can work and help my daughter and my family. I showed him I can survive without him. At last, we got divorced because I did not want to be brutalized like Ethiopia. No, to the oppressive husband. That is it.

Urjii Barii also said she sat with the *Manguddoos*/elders because couples came and consulted us to mediate their conflicts. She met with the spouses separately as well as together. She felt gender norms have a massive impact on divorce. Urjii Barii further elaborated her idea.

In those long years of my volunteer time in my community, I have seen that the issues of house chores sharing, women education, employment and income, and decision making were at the center of the conflict. Gender norms are always there. They have been at the heart of the marital conflict. That is a relationship of power with so many layers to it. They have a massive impact on marital relationships. Gender norms might lead to the breakup of marital relationships or enhance the chance of divorce. They also depend on how the partners handle these issues.

All participants have shared their experiences that gender norms change can cause marital conflicts and might also lead to divorce. For instance, Lalistu Margaa and Dhala Namaa witnessed that the conflict caused by gender norms change leads them to divorce and separation, respectively. Similarly, the literature review discussed strong evidence that gender norms change can cause conflicts, leading to marital termination (Hyman et al., 2008). In addition, Pessin (2018) emphasized that if the family could not embrace egalitarian relationships, gender norms could cause conflicts, leading to family instability and divorce.

On the other hand, Urjii Barii described that, although gender norms changes are at the center of the conflict, this may or may not lead to divorce. Urjii further elaborated that the marital break up depends on how the spouses handle the conflicts. Boru Baraqa and Bakkalacha Barii

underlined that gender norms could trigger conflicts among Ethiopian immigrant couples. They also noticed that if the couples cannot compromise their interests, gender norms change may break up the marital relationship.

The literature review and the qualitative data revealed that gender norms change could cause marital conflicts that might result in divorce. But it depends on how the couples handle their issues and their readiness to compromise personal interests. There might also be other factors that were not discovered because this research focused on gender norms change and mediation. Marital conflict mediation is discussed under the following subsection. Hence, at this point, it is safer to say gender norms changes can trigger and exacerbate marital conflict among immigrants and if the conflict is not handled properly, it could cause marriage termination. However, I would like to suggest further investigation to measure the relationship between gender norms change and divorce.

#### **4.5. *Jarsummaa* – A transnational traditional mediation institution**

One of the purposes of this study is to explore how Ethiopian immigrant couples handle marital conflicts in the absence of extended families that provide, social, emotional and psychological support. In semi-structured interviews, the participants were asked if they found traditional mediation that could help the spouse to de-escalate and solve their problems. Therefore, another theme that emerged from the one-on-one interviews is *Jarsummaa* or traditional family mediation. Under this section, four sub-themes that are related to traditional family mediation are presented. The first subsection presents traditional mediation practice and marriage conflict, while the second discusses *Jarsummaa*/mediation as a mechanism of social control. The third subsection discussed emancipating *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation to embrace egalitarian relationships. Finally, the fourth subsection presents *Jarsummaa*/mediation from Canadian legal aspects.

#### **4.5.1. Jarsummaa/traditional mediation practice and marriage**

##### **4.5.1.1. *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation values and the couple trust**

During the semi-structured data collection interviews, participants discussed that the community members had mediated their marriage to support them in solving their challenges. However, two participants who divorced and separated had discussed two different ideas about traditional marriage mediation or *Jarsummaa*. Lalistu Margaa is currently a divorced woman. She indicated her experience with traditional mediation as follows.

I knew *Jarsummaa* in *Oromo* or *Shimigilina* in *Amharic* or whatever is common in Ethiopia, even in Africa. My ex-husband called the community members that gave us some time to discuss our problems in the presence of Ethiopians with similar cultural backgrounds. I feel it was helpful at that time. But it did not work for us. After sometimes I decided to divorce.

On the other hand, a currently separated woman Dhala Namaa noticed that she did not want traditional mediation. She said

I knew the elders from our community members were mediating marital conflicts. I knew they sat *Jarsummaa*/mediation, and some couples solved their problems. But I did not want to tell them to meditate. Let alone our community elders, I did not want to tell my two brothers I have in this country. I believe couples are the most responsible for building their family or disturbing/ruining their family. The second my husband has already told my brothers and brainwashed them; they have already taken the side. Therefore, I did not want to tell them, especially our elder brother, who sponsored us to come to Canada. He did not talk to me for more than one year because I am separated. I have been separated for the past two years. I have not decided yet what to do because I do not want my children to be

victims of divorce. But, on the other hand, I do not want to return to that oppressive marriage again. So, let me see what the future holds. However, I do not need any *Jarsummaa* or mediation when I decide. This is for me. For other people, it may work.

The other three participants had also discussed the importance of traditional mediation. Fortunately, the three participants have volunteered for many years in their community as the *Manguddoo*/elders and mediated many spousal disputes. They have also been married for many years. For example, Urjii Barii has been married for 47years, Bakkalcha Barii for 32 years, and Boru Baraqa for 20 years. In addition, they have lived in Canada for many years: Urjii Barii for over 30years, Bakkalcha Barii for 36years, and Boru Baraqa for 15 years in Canada. Therefore, they shared the experience of how *Jarsummaa* or traditional mediation work.

Boru Baraqa said *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation considers and is rooted in many societal and family values when mediating. He further described the values of *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation as

The foundation of *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation is about reconciliation. *Jarsaa*/elder means to begin with a cultural context is the builder. It builds the family and the community. Its base is not found on separation or divorce. The collective view of justice is also more based on healing and responsibility-sharing. *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation holds somebody accountable to the community, not only to the person he has victimized. The person is also accountable to society at large. For instance, a man who oppressed his wife will not marry another girl from that community in Ethiopia where I grew up. In the same way, even here, if you do not value what we are telling you and making against the will of your family and your wife, if you do not agree with it, we have nothing to do with you.

Boru Baraqa explained that a man who oppresses his wife and does not apply the solution forwarded by the elders might be ostracized from the community and isolated from social support systems. For example, nobody bails him out if the case went to court. Bakkalcha Barii also described that *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation ensures accountability by making the abuser responsible. He explained that he was involved in mediating abusive husbands' marriage with other *Manguddoos*/elders. He compared the Ethiopian experience with the practice of immigrants in Canada. He indicated that

I knew some marital conflicts problems could be solved when I was in Ethiopia. There were also at times that the marriage ends with dissolution. For example, in Ethiopia, *Manguddoos*/elders coerce the partners to accept and apply the recommendation given by the elders. That is very strong, even coercing women into abusive marital relationships. If not accepted, the punishment could be imposed like isolation, loss of respect, and not offering social support like a funeral, emotional and psychological.

The experience in this country is a little bit different. The *Manguddoo*/elders could mediate the marriage, but at the same time, they have to take responsibility for the safety of the spouses. I knew a husband that even beat up his wife. I saw the case go to court. When you see such a situation, the husband could not find someone to bail him out if he did not accept the *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation decisions. The other thing, if the husband is abusive, he might not be respected in the community. These are how to ensure accountability. However, the ultimate goal of such pressure is to save the family from divorce because there are victims due to relationship interruption. Especially children are more victims of marriage break up.

Similar to Bakkalcha and Boru, Urjii Barii has agreed that immigrant families need social, emotional, and psychological support as immigrants are already isolated from their social base. It does not matter whoever sits in *Jarsummaa*/mediation as long as we offer the support family needs. Urjii Barii noticed that they are not only talking about gender norms when they sit for *Jarsummaa*/mediation. She asked, "look at the racialized broader structures. It is a very racialized structure out there that could affect women's and men's lives and ruin children's lives. We are dealing with the most arduous work here to save the family".

The participants have addressed multiple issues as a community initiative justice system based on the couple's interest. Boru Baraqa described *Jarsummaa* as a traditional conflict resolution, reconciliation, and restorative justice. He further explained that *Jarsummaa* has considered so many obligations to provide recommendations. He explained

For instance, if you go to court, you can get a divorce certificate, and it can be decided that the man has to cut monthly money for his children. It is easy to serve the law. But *Jarsumma*/mediation does not say that way. *Jarsumma*/mediation has so many obligations: emotional, psychological, respect, honor, and all these are interplays. Culture can emanate from those values that make *Jarsummaa*/mediation more effective than court decisions. You have to accept what *Jarsummaa*/*Manguddoos* say as a man because we consider all those values.

Boru Baraqa indicated that the couples coming to *Jarsummaa*/mediation know they want to compromise and be part of the solution. He said, "the couples well know how *Jarsummaa*/mediation works and want to solve their problems than divorce. They do not come to the elders when their desire is beyond our reach." Spouses, when they come to mediation, their fundamental interest is to protect the family. They also have information on whom to contact. They



might have gotten information about the *Manguddoos*/elders whom they could contact, the process *Jarsummaa*/mediation could go through to solve their problems, and they believe elders cannot take sides. Boru Baraqa explained why the partners come to *Jarsummaa*/mediation than law. He said

Even in Ethiopia, if the wife comes and reports her husband's problems, she assumes that I am her brother, or she assumes I am not taking the side to either partner. So, there is a trust that *Jarsummaa*/mediation cannot decide against the will of both of us. Instead, they couples believe *Manguddoo*/elders look for the truth and solves our problems. That shows how couples can trust *Jarsummaa*/mediation. If the women want to divorce or have a big problem behind the conflict, they mostly might not come to *Jarsummaa*/mediation. They can go directly to the law because they know the *Jarsummaa*/mediation cannot push them for divorce, or not give them divorce certificate."

The qualitative data stated that *Jarsummaa*/mediation might positively impact solving spouses' conflicts. However, the party's interest to go to mediation and apply the recommendations of *Jarsummaa*/mediation are the determining factors. For example, Lalistu Margaa described that although the community had meditated their conflicts with her ex-husband, the marriage ended in divorce. On the other hand, Dhala Namaa explained that she did not want the mediation because she had decided to separate. Therefore, she did not need to invite elders as she had already decided. However, she said she perceives that *Jarsummaa*/mediation is very helpful for the community members to discuss and solve their marital conflicts if they want to continue the marriage. Both Dhala Namaa and Lalistu Margaa also witnessed that *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation helped other community members who solved their marital conflicts and saved their marriages and family.

Similarly, the three *Jarsaa*/elders, i.e., Urjii Barii, Boru Baraqa, and Bakkalcha Barii, who volunteer in their community, described *Jarsummaa*/mediation has opened the opportunity to couples to discuss and fix their marital conflicts. However, it depends on the partners' interest whether they want to go to continue their marriage or go for divorce.

The literature review stated that Africa has rich indigenous-based conflict mediation experience, which its ultimate purpose is to encourage conflict resolution to find a peaceful solution to conflicts (Hussein 2011). In addition, African immigrants have sought support from community members and religious advisors to mediate and reconcile their problems before turning into mainstream service providers (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019). Ethiopia has considerable experience of cultural mediation led by respected elders and volunteers such as *Jarsummaa* of Oromo and *Shimgilina* of Amhara, who respected and mediated based on considering the value of a given society (Mulleeta 2014). Family mediation diligently gives attention to the family's emotional and passionate attachment, which helps them improve communication between parties for reconciliation and reunification (Kamenecka-Usova, 2014).

As stated in the literature review and discussed in the qualitative finding, there is a traditional mediation/*Jarsummaa* institution that mediates marital conflicts by respecting the cultural values of Ethiopian immigrants in Canada. The study further found that *Jarsummaa*/mediation offers social, psychological, and emotional support to marital conflicts and the family among Ethiopian immigrants in Canada. Overall, the existence of such culturally rich experienced institutions can play an enormous role through traditional conflict resolution, reconciliation, ensuring justice based on healing, and responsibility-sharing. Therefore *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation can positively influence the immigrants' marital relationships.

However, the decision to resolve problems depends on the spouses' interests, and sometimes mediation cannot successfully reconcile all marital conflicts.

#### **4.5.1.2. Assessment and analysis of family conflict**

*Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation institution is carried with its own procedure. The participants discuss that while sitting for *Jarsummaa*/mediation, the first thing they can do is collect information as much as possible about the problems. The participants discussed that they start with the assessment of the conflict. Boru Baraqa described that we first assess whether the conflict is a short time challenge or a serious conflict. He explained as follows

When we are meditating, we are not only looking for the depth of the problems, level of damage or violence, and the interest of the couples. We cannot only discuss the food not cooked or the money spent as the source of conflict. That could trigger conflict. We investigate whether the conflict is due to hate. We analyze the spouses' problems and interests. We can talk to the couples separately and together to hear their perspectives about their family, marriage, and children. We also analyze the level of violence and abuse because we have a responsibility for the safety of the couples. Then based on the assessment and analyses, we find the middle ground which helps us provide recommendations, resolve the conflict and ensure accountability.

Bakkalcha Bariii also explained that they start by assessing the problems' magnitude and interests of the couples. The *Manguddoos*/elders bring the issue to the table in the presence of couples. Assessment and investigation are the means of finding the cause of conflicts, the level of damage, knowing the couples' interests, and defining what recommendation the mediators could offer to solve the problems.

Lalistu Margaa has shared her experience of the process of *Jarsummaa*/mediation when elders conducting the mediation with her and her ex-husband. Three community members had consulted her before she was divorced. She reiterated that she feels *Jarsummaa*/mediation depends on the interest of the couples. She explained

I like *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation because it is my culture, and they are my people who tried to solve my problems. They talked to me about my problems and figured out our interests. The community member talked to me about what the problem was. I told them the detail of what my ex-husband did to me. My ex-husband was also asked about his problems and his interest. I wanted the mediation with my ex-husband because we have a daughter. Even after six months of separation, *Jarusmmaa* sat for mediation before we were granted the divorce certificate if we wanted to keep the marriage. However, we broke up. *Jarsummaa*/mediation facilitates communication. You see, you need someone whom you talk to even in your native languages. They discussed the issues in detail and offered us opportunities to treat our marriage and family. But the final decision is up to a couple whether to go with divorce or not.

Urjii Barii described that there is no formal procedure for *Jarsummaa*/mediation. However, she said

We consult the couples and investigate the problems. We investigate the problems not to judge but to provide the needed advice. The spouses, especially the women, wants to talk to us because they did not want the divorce. The assessment and analysis help us find the middle ground to help them deal with their family crises.

The existing literature did not explicitly explain the process of marital conflict assessment and analysis of mediation. However, Connor et al. (2016) argue that Somali immigrant women in

USA would rather discuss their challenges with the community members than directly seek support from mainstream service providers. The couples want to share details of their marital problems and discuss their conflicts with the community members and elders, which offers them a way to solve their problems (Boyle and Ali 2010).

The qualitative data from the in-depth interviews also demonstrated that immigrant families wanted to share their problems with the elders. It is not new that the spouses have communicated the information to people of similar cultural and social backgrounds. The couples also have an excellent opportunity to share their confidential information in their native language without a translator or communication barriers. Social work practices consider the appropriateness of clients' cultural, spiritual, and social values to offer better and more fruitful counseling services. The clients would like to share their problems and confidential information in their native languages without translators. Therefore, from a social work perspective, *Jarsummaa*/mediation is the most appropriate institution for couples discussing the details of the marriage conflict among Ethiopian immigrants. Hence, it positively influences the marriage to facilitate good communication and reconciliation when the couples are interested in continuing marriage and have no abusive relationships.

#### **4.5.1.3. De-escalating conflict, consciousness-raising, and enabling the spouses**

One of the purposes of conflict management is de-escalating the conflict and consciousness-raising. Participants indicate that the traditional mediation/*Jarsummaa* helped the couple de-escalate the conflict, which offers the opportunity to the spouse to cool off. They are also raising the consciousness of the couples on how to deal with such a conflict. Urjii Barii described that as feminist liberation strugglers, they teach the couples about de-colonizing their relationships from abusive gender norms. She explained as follows

The immigrant spouses and even women knew about their rights and where they could get help. I can tell you all immigrant women knew 911. We can help them emotionally and psychologically free from anger, frustration, and trauma. Then we are trying to raise their consciousness about liberating the relationship within the family. Most immigrants flee from Ethiopia to avoid the oppressive and dictator government system. They are liberation strugglers. We teach them that if they cannot liberate relationships within their family and the community, how can they be liberation strugglers. They have to get rid of oppressive relationships, whether within the family, community, or the nation broadly.

We are also trying to use the opportunity to bridge the gap, like raising awareness and teaching about the legal system how to handle their conflict. We teach the women how to handle the relationship as well. Women need to know because she has to be de-colonized first. Her femininity imposes on her to bear the pain to keep the family together. The culture constructs her femininity/womanhood to sacrifice for her children and family relationships. Therefore, we raise women's consciousness to de-colonize from those gender norms.

The other purpose of *Jarsummaa*/mediation is to provide the support to de-escalate the couple's anger and help them find a solution based on their interests. Boru Baraqa explained that we are obligated as community leaders and elders to enable the family and protect the children. He elaborated that

To de-escalate the spouse's conflict, we even start by praying and end with a blessing based on the couple's religious denominations. Such spiritual values have de-escalated the emotion of spouses. Then we teach about liberating themselves from oppressive gender norms. That is a kind of raising their consciousness to embrace

egalitarian relationships. Sometimes, we can use metaphors when it is not good to explain things straightforward. In *Jarsummaa*/mediation, we use lots of metaphors to help the couples better think of their family and put the decision. In addition, we coach them, and reconciliation comes through finding a middle ground. The middle ground is defined based on the couple's willingness to compromise their individual interests in order to protect their marriage, family, and children.

Finally, we come up with what would work how it works well. The final decision is mainly left for the couples if they are convinced to stay married or go with the other options, including separation/divorce. We have to put issues into perspective and then sit for the mediation. If we find the divorce is important, especially considering its long-term impact, we recommend separation and divorce even to the court. I remember we decided the marriage to break up because we had to take responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of the wife because her husband was abusive.

Similarly, Bakkalcha Bariii noted that *Jarsummaa*/mediation provides couples with emotional and psychological support to de-escalate the conflict, additional information, and support to overcome challenging situations. He said, "the *Manguddoos*/elders have a better consciousness about women's rights and husband obligations. We teach especially the husbands not to be in trouble situations, including not to be abusive, like beating their wives. Because women protection is very strong in Canada." He also said, *Manguddoos*/elders sometimes help newcomer couples connect with job opportunities and provide some financial support to some extent.

A divorced woman participant testified that *Jarsuummaa*/mediation helped them to cool down and discuss with her ex-husband before they divorced. Lalistu Margaa indicated that the

community members first asked her to calm down and briefly provide information to handle the conflict peacefully. She explained

The three community members asked me to cool down at that time. I was okay. They also talked to the police. The police also said okay if they can solve our problems. As a matter of fact, we did not want the marriage to continue. He did not want to be changed. I also do not want an oppressive relationship. I told to the elders the problems I had. They talked to my husband as well. That was a considerable help even to talk to my people while I was highly frustrated and traumatized. I have immense respect and thanks for those three people who were frustrated and upset by my situation. In the end, we are divorced because it did not work out for us.

The data collected illustrated insights into the support offered by *Jarsummaa*/mediations for the couples. The literature review stated that traditional family mediation considers the family's social, emotional, and psychological values in improving communication and maintaining relationships between spouses (Sisay 2015). In addition, community and religious leaders can provide social, psychological, and emotional support to mediate and reconcile the African immigrant marital conflicts (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019). However, the literature did not describe specifically what was done in de-escalating, consciousness-raising, and enabling the immigrant family to solve their conflicts and embrace the egalitarian relationship.

As discussed by the participants, *Jarsummaa*/mediation uses assessment and investigation approaches to figure out the cause of the conflict. The traditional mediation/*Jarsummaa* also provides the consciousness-raising needed and enables the families to figure out what would work better and how it works for their marriages. Hence, such traditional support positively influences marriage to maintain a good relationship based on the partners' interests.



#### 4.5.2. Jarsummaa – a mechanism of Social Control

The finding from the semi-structured interviews indicated that *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation had provided social, emotional, and psychological support to the spouses during marital conflict. *Jarsummaa*/mediation also positively influences the marriage by facilitating discussions during the conflict. This process can help the couples to solve their problems. However, *Jarsummaa*/mediation also serves as a mechanism of social control that perpetuates the male dominance gender norms among immigrant Ethiopians. Participants discussed that some *Manguddoos*/elders selected for *Jarsummaa*/mediation can coerce the women to wait in abusive marital relationships even without addressing the causes of the conflict. Bakkalcha Barii indicated that *Jarsummaa*/mediation is not free of social norms. He described his experiences in Ethiopia and the experience he has seen in Canada. He explained

In Ethiopia, *Jarsummaa*/mediation served as a means of social control because male dominance gender norms influenced some elected elders. The elders coerce the woman to bear her pain and wait in the marital relationship. They say like, “pass those mistakes your husband did for your children, in our culture women cannot say/do to her husband that, its shame for her as well, it's our norms women has to tolerate.” Few elected elders are either unconscious of women’s rights or intentionally do that to women.

Our *Manguddoos*/elders are also not free from such norms in Canada even though our consciousness is better than Ethiopia elders. We did this not to protect the man but to protect the family, especially the children. In fact, we do not coerce the woman to wait in a very abusive marriage while she is beaten up. No, we cannot do that. Even *Manguddoos*/elders have an obligation to report such violations. The *Manguddoos* consult the wife and ask her to tolerate, to some extent, small mistakes because the divorce can

affect her children's future lives. She is also affected than men, first by raising the kids as a single mother and second when she sees her children's lives are in trouble due to divorce.

Boru Baraqa disagrees with the idea of “*Manguddoos*/elders coercing” the women. He said we could ask the couples to compromise their interest. The *Manguddoos*/elders ask both men and women to compromise their individual interests for their family and, most notably, the children. He elaborated his idea in the following manner.

Hmm ... I studied not only social work but criminology too. The first thing that we need to understand is how to balance culture and rights. The second yes, *Jarsummaa*/mediation can ask the couples to compromise their individual interest to solve their problems. For example, we can ask a woman to compromise her interest to her family or children. Because in case they are divorced, their children development will be impacted. However, we can consider women's rights. We cannot simply coerce a woman. Yes, family is important; family is number one for we immigrants. That is why we have sacrificed everything for our children. So, one thing that we can do is consciousness raising to the couples that we have an obligation to raise and protect our children. Second, we immigrants have a community that we have to consider as a support system for each other, whether the husband and wife accept the mediation or not.

We want to assess if the marriage is way better for the family, then ask them to compromise. Otherwise, if we find that divorce is a better option, especially considering the couple's safety, we could recommend divorce. I remember I decided the marriage to break up. Because we had to take responsibility for her safety and well-being, when safety is compromised, especially for a husband who quickly jumps to beat up his wife and fight, I cannot even mediate the conflict. So, we cannot pressure and coerce a woman to tolerate

everything while she is seriously oppressed. I cannot be involved in such mediation personally. Instead, we can assess their problems and ask them if they compromise personal interests for the well-being of the children and the entire family. There is an Oromo metaphor. I always quote it when I sit for mediation. For me, “*Jarsa jechuun kan garaa harii male kan mataa harii miti*”. It means an elder is a person with a gray heart, not gray hair. So, we ask the couples to compromise. We ask more of a woman to compromise her interests.

However, Urjii Barii explicitly described that the *Mangudoos*/elders coerced women to bear the pain and wait in marital relationships in Canada, the same way as in Ethiopia. She said sometimes men are also in an oppressive relationship, and we also coerce him for his children considering there is a racist system out there for Black men. But *Jarsummaa*/mediation pressures the women to tolerate the oppression rather than exercise their rights fully. Urjii Barii described

The woman swallowed her pain and shame and brought the issue to the *Manguddoos*/elders. That is her womanhood constructed by the culture. She just kept her mouth shut because she is the one who is supposed to keep the family together even when he abuses her. She suffers for the sake of the children. That is really deeply ingrained in our community; she is responsible for children. That piece of sacrifice is what kept her quiet through the beatings and come to the elders. You know it is very painful. So, when she is asked to compromise, it is explicitly coercing her to wait in the relationship. I cannot do that. In the mediation I participated in, I could not leave those abuses. As a feminist woman, I have an obligation to report such violations, and I do. Women sacrifice for the sake of the children and their families. So, I feel *Jarsummaa*/mediation is not free of cultural norms, and sometimes it ends up oppressing the women further.

Dhala Namaa is a participant who did not go to *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation to solve her marital conflict. She said I believe *Jarsummaa*/mediation is helpful to discuss the couple's problems in the presence of respected people and perhaps find joint solutions. However, it is for those who have not decided to separate or divorce. She shared her experiences and thought about *Jarsummaa*/mediation as follows.

For me, no one wants to break up or interrupt his marriage. But if you have decided, nobody can stop you. So, I took time and made the final decision. That is my final decision, and no one can reverse this decision. I thought only me, and my husband could solve our problems, build our family or ruin our family. I felt nobody's support was needed for the decision I made. I did not want to invite someone to my husband's and my issues.

Second, I know *Jarsummaa*/mediation coerces the women because nobody wants the children to be victims of divorce. I am happy in *Jarsummaa*/mediation for protecting the children, but I did not want the pressure from the elders.

The other reason is that even my bigger brother, who sponsored me to come to Canada, had already judged me. Of course, this might be only my brother's problem, but he took side. I have two brothers in Canada. My husband has told my older brother everything and brainwashed or convinced him. So, they could not hear me or believe me. For them, my husband was always right, he loved his family, he was hard-working, but I was wrong. So, they have no willingness to hear my pain.

Dhala Namaa further described male dominance gender norms highly influencing *Jarsummaa*/mediation in Ethiopia. She said, even though this problem might be my brothers' problem, I can see *Jarsummaa*/mediation as a mechanism of social control same way as it is in Ethiopia. Dhala Namaa continued

I could say this problem might be my brothers' problem. But it has significant cultural elements in it. My brothers have no willingness to listen to my problems. They said that I have to tolerate and live with such problems. It is all known that such problems can happen between husband and wife. They did not want to hear your pain and help you solve your problems. They see divorce as a shameful thing. For instance, they think it is a shame someone's daughter is divorced. So, it is not good our sister is gone to divorce. They are proud; I, their sister, did not divorce no matter the oppression I suffered. That is the norm in this country. They did not want to hear and investigate the problems and you are suffering. They want only like their sister marriage is okay. They did not want to help me. I have not called my brother for more than one year because of this problem. I have not talk to him because he might ask me why I was separated. They want their pride by me waiting in that oppressive relationship. They want respect among their community group and their friends. If I got divorced or separated, they might be disrespected. They fear gossip in the community. That is why I did not want to talk to my older brother after I separated. But my husband always appreciates them.

Lalistu Margaa had two perspectives about *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation. She said they coerce me to wait in the relationships only for our daughter. She explained how the elders discuss with her as follows:

They did not see divorce as a shame or other thing. They coerce me, but the main reason for the coercion was our daughter and our family. We were new and about two years. My daughter was four years at that time. So, they wanted us to be together and pleased me to give him one last chance. They said your daughter could be affected because she does not have a brother, sister, uncle, ant, grandma. Indeed, divorce can be seen as

unpleasant thing for a woman in Ethiopia. But no members of the *Manguddoos*/elders said it is shameful for you to be divorced. No, they did not say that. They actually said being a single mom can be challenging for you. Yes, I believe it would be good to be with my daughter's dad. I gave him one last chance, and we started living together for some time. I tried. It did not work. Finally, I filed the divorce signature to the court when I decided. After one year, I was granted my divorce certificate.

The qualitative data described that *Jarsummaa*/mediation has two features. One feature of *Jarsummaa*/mediation provides social, psychological, and emotional support to the married couple for reconciliation. The *Manguddoos*/elders help the immigrant couples figure out what works better for them and how it works. As participants discussed in the excerpt about *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation, the members of the mediator could coerce the spouses to compromise their personal interests in order to protect their family, especially for the children. Some participants described such coercion as compromising for the family.

The other feature of *Jarsummaa*/mediation is coercing the spouses, especially the women, to bear the pain for the children's sake and pressuring women not to report to the mainstream service providers. In this case, *Jarsummaa*/mediation serves as a mechanism of social control. The literature review stated that, despite helping the family solve their conflicts, the elders selected for *Jarsummaa*/mediation sometimes coerce women into abusive marital relationships without addressing the cause of the conflict (Kumsa et al., 2021).

Overall, *Jarsummaa*/mediation has a positive contribution in solving marital conflict and maintaining good relationships between spouses. Moreover, such traditional mediation institutions can support immigrant families struggling with integration and settlement issues. On the other hand, both qualitative data and literature demonstrated that such social institutions are not free of

cultural norms. Therefore, *Jarsummaa*/mediation might be used as a mechanism of social control and perpetuating male gender norms.

#### **4.5.3. Emancipating *Jarsummaa*/mediation to embrace egalitarian relationship**

All participants agreed that the availability of *Jarsummaa*/mediation can help the immigrant Ethiopians in mediating conflict, not only marital conflict but also any forms of conflict in the community. They believed that *Jarsummaa*/mediation is a social support system and adds value to building a good family relationship. However, they all acknowledge that *Jarsummaa*/mediation might compromise the elements of liberation and spouses' rights. Indeed, some of the participants have shared their concern that it might perpetuate women's oppression. Therefore, participants explain that it is possible to capitalize on the values of *Jarsummaa*/mediation to embrace egalitarian family relationships.

Bakkalcha Barii explained that the best way to capitalize on the values of *Jarsummaa*/traditional is to consider *Jarsummaa*/mediation as an institution and empower it. He explained

The first thing to emancipate *Jarsummaa*/mediation is to raise the consciousness of *Manguddoos*/elders. Mediation must not compromise women's rights and Canadian law. A member of *Manguddoos*/elders who does not know Canadian law cannot mediate marriage conflicts in this country, never. They could get into trouble because they might violate the law. Our *Manguddoos*/elders are the mature and old people who lived for many years in this country. The Canadian legal system supports us. They consider our requests when we ask the police and the court to mediate the couples. We can bail out the man. Similarly, we have to respect women's rights and show our commitment, including reporting the abuser to the police.

Lalistu Margaa, explained it could be extremely challenging for the *Jarsummaa*/mediation institution to mediate marriage in Canada unless it liberates itself from the male dominant gender norms. She noticed the *Manguddoos*/elders struggled between traditional gender norms and Canadian law. She testified what she encountered during mediation with her ex-husband as follows

In my case, *Manguddoos*/elders asked the police officers to mediate me with my husband. Then the police officers say ok. Listen, the police and court respect our culture unless we violate the law. However, they follow the process if the *Jarsummaa*/mediation coerces the women. So, the police officers repeatedly asked me what the *Manguddoo*/elders said to me, if they forced me to accept the mediation without my consent, whether *Jarsummaa*/mediation told me to hide my husband's abuse, lots of questions. First, the *Manguddoos*/elders asked me to cool down so they could solve our problems. I was okay; they intervened to solve our problem because I did not want to break up with my ex-husband. Also, I did not want to tell all our problems to the police because my ex-husband would be in trouble. I did not want to put him in another challenge by reporting to the police. That was my stance. But I feel other women do not want to hide their problems. In that case, the *Manguddoos*/elders cannot mediate the conflict in this country. So, I do not think the *Manguddoos*/elders can continue male dominance norms as we knew them in Ethiopia.

The other participant, Urjii Bari, spoke about *Jarsummaa*/mediation emancipation and liberating it from male-dominant cultural norms. She said that in order to liberate the men and women they are mediating, the institution of *Jarsummaa*/mediation must be liberated first. It could be the most challenging, but it is all about changing the mentality of elders to an egalitarian relationship.



The other participant, Boru Baraqa, elaborated that *Jarsummaa*/mediation does not need that liberation. Instead, he said *Jarsummaa*/mediation institution is all about spouses compromising their individual interest to accommodate the family's interests. He described

*Jarsummaa*/mediation is all about how to intermarry the two world views, i.e., liberation versus family. Indeed, the family depends on compromising, i.e., the spouses have to compromise for their family and children. Well, every culture has a deficit. Of course, the spouses can reject what the *Manguddoos*/elders proposed. They have full rights if they feel *Jarsummaa*/mediation oppresses their interest and go for divorce. But it impacts the children's future development. We must find what will work as we move forward, identifying which part of our culture has more negative than positive. Hence, we have to take those positive cultures which are helpful for our family and community. My view is always the result, the end point that is helping the family.

In addition, Boru Baraqa explained that *Jarsummaa*/mediation should not be against women's rights or Canadian Law. He said it is important to understand the gender norms and women's rights of the country we live in to mediate marital conflicts. Boru Baraqa further elaborated

We are in Canada; it is not *Jarsummaa*/mediation like in Ethiopia. There is not what people think of *Jarsummaa*/mediation. We got a very meticulous way of solving problems. Culture gives value to the law or legal aspect. And law or justice in law is recognize the community values and mediations unless it compromises the women's rights. The culture often continuously compromises as we develop in different forms. So, I guess it is part of human civilization's ideas. However, we always have to find the balance and try to extract what would work with the circumstance with the real situation and find the middle ground.

I do love *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation is often a very productive thing in finding that balance than the justice system that decides against the abuser to serve his terms but does not consider other family and social values.

The participants in this study have opposing views on the position of *Jarsummaa*/mediation, on whether it needs liberating from traditional norms or not. Some participants agreed that *Jarsummaa*/mediation needs to be liberated because it could perpetuate the traditional norms if it is not liberated. But, on the contrary, others categorically object that it did not perpetuate oppression but gave options to the couples to compromise their personal interests to protect the future of the family and children. However, both groups agreed that *Jarsummaa*/mediation must embrace egalitarian relationships, Canadian legal aspects, and women's right to function.

There is no specific literature on *Jarsummaa*/mediation emancipations. However, Mulleta (2014) suggested that it is possible to empower such valuable indigenous cultural institutions to be suitable for the countries we live in to capitalize on its positive values. In addition, I felt the spouses have the right to reject the biased decision proposed by the *Manguddoos*/elders. Overall, despite the weakness discussed above, I still believe that the advantages or positive qualities of *Jarsummaa*/mediation vastly outweigh its negative side. As a social work professional, I further suggest that respecting the values of the clients' background would have enormous positive impacts in addressing the trauma and frustration of the couple's marital conflicts. Hence, with slight revision or adjustment to the law and women's rights, *Jarsummaa*/mediation could serve as the best indigenous tool in resolving conflict among Ethiopian immigrant communities. Moreover, I would recommend further study on how to emancipate this valuable cultural institution to embrace and promote egalitarian relationships.

#### **4.6. Legal intervention and family relationship**

The other theme that emerged from the semi-structured interviews is legal intervention and family relationships among Ethiopian immigrant families. Participants mentioned that mainstream service providers intervention could be understood differently among spouses in marital conflict. Under this topic, three sub-sections are presented. The first sub-section discussed, I feel I am safer in Canada (immigrant women's protection in Canada), while the second sub-section presented the police intervention and its impact on marital relationships. The last sub-section discusses women's protection as a mechanism for threatening men.

##### **4.6.1. I feel I am safer in Canada**

The study participants described that change in gender norms are the result of women's education, employment, increase in earning, and decision making. However, the foundation of gender norms change in Canada for immigrant women is the attention given to women's rights and protection compared to countries of origin. Therefore, women have the information and can easily access the mainstream service providers whenever they want. Bakkalcha Barii explained that African immigrant women felt protected because women's rights are institutionalized in Canada's policies, legal system, and mainstream services providers. He said

In Canada, many things changed due to solid feminism that promoted the right of women. Therefore, when a woman is abused and crying at her home, she can call the police, or even the neighbours hear and call the police. Then the police can force the husband to leave home and often arrest him. She also accesses the lawyer, counsel, whatever without a fee. So, this is a significant change, and the base for traditional to egalitarian gender norms change.

Similarly, other participants mentioned that immigrant women have gotten more freedom in Canada than in Ethiopia. Boru Baraqa explained that the cause of marital conflict is mostly the tension arising from women's newly found rights and men's pre-existing socially constructed power. He said a husband has problems of understanding and acknowledging those changes. I like the metaphor “*Biyyaa baanulee biyyiittin nukeessaa hinbaatu,*” meaning even though we migrated from our country, our background cultural norms live with us.

The other participants confirmed that women receive more protection in Canada than in Ethiopia. Lalistu Margaa said that there might be other problems like racism for visible minority groups. However, the protection of women is impressive. I like how they take care of me. She noted that:

After I called the police, the police asked me lots of questions to investigate the problems. They said what bad thing he did to you. Did he beat you? Did he beat your daughter? Can you tell us anything that he did to you? I said everything, no. I reported to them we had a dispute on money only. The police officers argued with me, how you could be divorced only for money and simple dispute. Two girls were living with us. The girls were my husband's cousins who immigrated with us from Kenya refugee camp. The police asked those girls too. They reported that he did not beat her. The police officers asked him to leave. They gave me their telephone number and went, but after some time they came back. They asked me more questions. I was decided not to tell them no matter what. But I said, wow, to myself, how much they care for women.

Lalistu Margaa continued telling her story about her protection. She said, the police officers told her what she could do if her husband tried to abuse her. She said she got more information and more support. She explained

I am happy with Canadian law. They understand that couples can get into conflict due to various reasons. But they do not want to see physical assault both ways. They do not want to see a husband beating up his wife, and similarly, they do not want a wife to assault a husband. I knew this because they asked me repeatedly, they interviewed me frequently lots of questions if this man was violent. They also advised me to protect my safety and security. For instance, they told me when he come home angry, go to the other room, try to escape in the other direction, etc. They gave me such advice to ensure my safety. I really thank the police officers. They did not rush to divorce the marriage.

Lalistu Margaa reported that she got a government house because she decided to divorce. She described that the caseworker and the police officers had visited her on many occasions to provide support and ensure her safety. Lalistu explained as follows

They asked me if my husband and I had met in one year of separation time. I told them we had met. I worked at night shift. The caseworker came and asked me if my husband came to me/home. I told them he always came and passed the night with his daughter. They said, how come this happened. I told them because I was working at night shift, and he passed the night with his daughter. They asked me what about your safety and security. I told them he loves his daughter. He came and took care of his daughter. I understood we were in conflict and separated, but also, I know he is not a violent man. They took my word, but they were not angry at me. They were worried for me more than I do. So, this all protection is a power for a woman, and even it might be the cause of gender norms change. Hence, I said, **“I felt I am more protected and safer in Canada than Ethiopia.”**

The literature indicates that women have gained newfound freedom in western developed countries. For example, Connor et al. (2016) said that Somali immigrant women felt more protected in the US because they have got protection from mainstream service providers, including calling 911 emergency phone. Although women did not usually seek the service, African immigrant women's information and protection have been readily available in host developed countries (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019, Boyle and Ali, 2009).

The qualitative data demonstrates that women felt more liberal and independent from male-dominant gender norms. In addition, Lalistu Margaa's story illustrated that women had gotten integrated assistance from housing agencies, caseworkers, police officers, and the court that would help them escape abusive relationships. Hence, the freedom and legal protections available for women might negatively impact the marital relationship for a husband who holds male-dominant norms, attitudes, and practices.

#### **4.6.2. Police intervention and its impact on marital relationships**

The study participants pointed out that police intervention during marital conflicts affect the relationships. They said that although the police protect the women from violence, spousal relationship is no longer the same after police intervention. Boru Baraqa described that when the mainstream service providers intervene, there is a probability that the relationship is not only determined by the couples. The legal institutions have something to say from the legal perspective, especially if they found abuse in the relationships. Therefore, the police action may hurt the communication between the spouses if they investigate and find physical abuse.

Similarly, Bakkalcha Bari explained that once the police or courts and lawyers are involved, it could disturb the dialogue between husband and wife. He said, "there is a narrative that black men are often under watchdog or surveillance by the mainstream services providers in

this country. In other words, he thinks a man who tried to embrace egalitarian relationships felt not respected by Canadian law because he is black, let alone an abusive husband.” He said white police officers abuse black men, thus, when something happens, and women call a police officer he is scrutinized whether there are problems or not. A man thinks he has no rights, or the legal system oppresses his rights. He explained

When a wife calls the police, the husband does not have any opportunity to explain the issue and cannot be heard on the spot. Then the police force him to leave and arrest him without even asking him a single question. He could pass the night in jail, which is very humiliating. When the police officer forces a man to leave home, a man considers it as an act of attack on his manhood which significantly damages the relationship. The police can investigate the cause of conflict, but it is after the husband is already in jail or bailout by someone’s help. So, when his manhood is attacked, he feels frustrated and cannot recover from that pain easily. Because he thinks his wife should have told the *Manguddoos*/elders, or church leaders/Sheikhs, but she handover him to white police officer that could attack him badly or ruin his life. Everybody knows what these white police officers do to black men. He thinks I do not have any hope from this woman once she passes me to my enemy so that he can consider divorce.

Dhala Namaa has been a separated woman for the past two years. When she was asked if she reported to the police to get help, she says I did not lose my mind. I have “*Addaa and Safuu*.” It means I have “good norms/manner and morality.” She explained why she did not ask for help from the police as follows:

No, I did not report, and I cannot do that, never. The first reason is I have “*Addaa and Safuu*” meaning norms and morality. Second, he did not abuse me physically like he

did not beat me. Even if he beat me up, I cannot report my husband to the police because he was my husband; he is my children's father. I cannot pass him to the stranger or police because I know what to follow. I knew what this law was up to him or how much he could be in trouble.

Even though we are separated, we talk and discuss how to help our children not to be affected mentally and physically. If I report to the police, a bad situation can happen that could apart us, which cannot help our children and ruin his life. I cannot do that to anybody, let alone my children's dad. Even If he abused me or did trouble things to me, I cannot report to the police under any circumstance. I did not want oppression; that is why I separated. At the same time, I did not report to that violent system out there. I wanted to raise my children, and I wanted him to visit his children.

Lalistu Margaa, a divorced woman, even though she called the police when she disputed with her husband, she did not tell the police everything. She said, "I knew if I reported everything my ex-husband did to me, he would be arrested and more trouble to him. I felt white police might violate black men. I heard that." Urjii Barii also noticed that women do not want to call the police on their husbands, no matter what he did to them. She said, "women save their husband from white police abuse while their husband abuses them."

The literature stated that African immigrant women do not want to report their husbands to white police officers due to the institutionalized racist system. Boyle and Ali (2009) claimed that Black men are vulnerable to systemic racism in developed countries; therefore, women tolerate any pain to save their partners and children's dad from the abusive system. Black crime creates good opportunities for white service providers, i.e., police officers, judges, lawyers, and correctional officers are all benefited from black crimes (Lynn and Dixson 2013). The abused



African immigrant women do not want to report domestic violence to the police officers because it attracts serious punishment by the racist legal system (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019).

The discussion and literature stated that immigrant women understood that black men are vulnerable to systemic racism. Therefore, they bear their pain to protect their husbands from the racist justice system while their spouses abuse them. It is so strange that a woman could not seek help while her partner abuses her. But also, indirectly save black men from the prevailing racialized justice system. More specifically, the racist justice system against Black men indirectly forces the women not to seek justice for their abuse. Overall, when police officers are called in, it further disturbs the communications between husband and wife.

#### **4.6.3. Women protection – a mechanism to threaten husbands**

The other theme that emerged from the semi-structured interviews is women's protection – a mechanism to threaten husbands. Participants pointed out that some immigrant women use the existing women's legal protection to intimidate and threaten husbands. Boru Baraqa said that he heard immigrant women might threaten their husbands, but he did not know how true it was. On the other hand, Bakkalcha Bari indicated that he mediated marital conflicts where some women could threaten their husbands. He explained in such a manner

Immigrants sometimes go through different challenges. For instance, Ethiopians may not get visas directly to developed countries when they flee from Ethiopia. They might escape political and social injustice from Ethiopia and flee to Kenya, Sudan, South Africa, etc., refugee camps. When they were in refugee camps where women's rights were not protected, her husband might violate their wives, including physical violence. That could be big pain and trauma that cannot be healed psychologically for the woman. So, she may go for revenge because she thinks the law gives her a better position than him in Canada.

Whenever her husband can go against her interest or simple conflicts, she may intimidate him into reporting the previous violence. She can also get legal counsel or a lawyer that supports her in this country to threaten her husband.

The other participant Lalistu Margaa said that a woman could threaten her husband, especially if he is abusive. She said it is a kind of retaliation for what her husband did to her when they were in Ethiopia or in refugee camps. She said that a woman's revenge against her husband is sometimes stronger to the extent that she cannot even allow him to see his children. She explained as follows

I heard of a woman who is an immigrant from Ethiopia. We were together in a shelter until the government found me a house. She has two boy children. They were a refugee in South Africa. She reported that her life was in danger. She reported that in South Africa, he had beaten me up and locked the door on me for three days not to get help. She said I was in a locked house for three days without eating food, without going to the store to buy food and get help. She reported he could do to me the same thing in Canada and could kill us. So, she applied her husband not to see his boys. Let alone see his children, she and her boys have been told to call a police force when they see him in a far distance. She did that to him. Her ex-husband is my co-worker in the company I am working. He said he did not do that all to her. But I think they were not good after they came to Canada. However, if she is traumatized, emotionally and psychologically affected, I guess she might go for revenge.

The other separated woman Dhala Namaa also explained her perception and what she heard about a woman who reported her husband to the police. She said I perceive her ex-husband was

abusive, but she reported life-threatening, although he did not threaten her for death. She described it as follows.

I knew a woman who reported her husband to the police. She said he threatened me with a knife. So, he was arrested for some time, but the community members bailed him out. After that, he was under house arrest again for some time. Then he was free from house arrest, and he was prohibited from going to other countries. But he cannot find a job because his background is already flagged up in violations when the agencies make a criminal check. And also, he cannot leave this country, and he cannot be a formal employee. So, now he is working cash work. I knew that case.

Urjii Barii also indicated that some women threaten and intimidate their husbands using legal protections. She reported she knew and came across on mediation a woman that oppressed her husband using the legal rights in Canada. She explained

There are other examples of wives who use legal protection as a tool for revenge and for punishing the violent husband. There are others who would threaten to call 911 as a way of putting a control leash on the husband. This tells us that we cannot paint all women with the same brush. There are a lot of variations among women's responses to abuse, and some women may be abusers as well. So, although many Ethiopian cultural mediators may impose asymmetric gender norms and coerce women into abusive marital relationships, some women also find strategies of threatening or punishing abusive partners by using their rights to legal protection.

The qualitative data indicated that immigrant Ethiopian women might threaten and intimidate abusive husbands for what he did before coming to Canada or if he is abusive at present. However, no literature supports that woman threaten their husbands using the existing legal

protection. Therefore, I would strongly suggest further research using different study tools to explore the magnitude of such allegations.

Overall, if I say something, I could say that it is not a woman, but the racist injustice system against Black men might indirectly threaten men. For example, a Black man who has seen other Black men brutalized by white police might be intimidated, let's say if women report an allegation on him. I wanted to be clear on this. First, unless and otherwise, a man is abusive, he has no reason to be threatened by his wife. The second is that systemic racism in the justice system can threaten Black men. The narratives that Black men are under surveillance by white police, even non-abusive men, might be threatening, given that some women want to have some control in their relationships.

## CHAPTER – FIVE: CONCLUSION

### 5.1. Conclusion

This research is intended to gain a better understanding of the impact of gender norms change and traditional mediation on marriage among Ethiopian immigrants living in Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph. This study also has three specific objectives (1) explore the impact of changing gender norms in marital relationships, (2) investigate the effect of traditional family conflict mediation on marriages, and (3) examine women's access to rights and protection on marriage among Ethiopian immigrants. In addition, this research study embarked on responding to three specific questions (1) How do gender norms change impact the marriage? (2) What is traditional mediation impact on marital relationships? and (3) What is the impact of women's protection and access to legal service providers on the spousal relationships among Ethiopian immigrants living in Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph?

The study was guided by the constructivism paradigm to explore the participants' beliefs, experiences, and perspectives of gender norms change and traditional mediation on marriage. Qualitative study design and semi-structured interviews were used to gather qualitative data. Five married and separated/divorced people from Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph participated in the study. The data were analyzed using a thematic approach. Five major themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews: transnational gender norms, factors perpetuating traditional gender norms, women's empowerment on immigrant marriage, *Jarsummaa* – a transnational traditional mediation institution and marriage, and legal intervention and family relationships.

Participants described their perspectives about gender norms changes by sharing their experiences from both Ethiopia and Canada. The study findings demonstrated that Ethiopian immigrants living in Canada are highly likely to hold traditional gender norms relationships. But

there might be outliers, for example Ethiopian immigrant like Urjii Barii that deviate from the community and embrace egalitarian family relationships. As presented in the findings, Urjii Barii has believed men do household chores to embrace egalitarian gender relationships, which implies an attitude and practice of men liberation from dependence on women for example in the area of cooking and to eat food. However, the study illustrated that most Ethiopian immigrant men took less responsibility for homework or did not do household chores, especially cooking and cleaning. Hence, household chores responsibility-sharing can cause marital conflicts among Ethiopian immigrant spouses.

Women have participated in paid jobs, even though they were doing most housework that could cause marital conflict between spouses. In addition, immigrant Ethiopian men hold culturally constructed masculine characteristics contributing to unequal power relationships with their partners. Such masculine characteristics are manifested by men's resource control, deciding against the women's will and imposing their interests on their wives. The other most important behaviour is that women felt more responsible than men to keep good family relationships and protect the children. Overall, the study illustrated that Ethiopian immigrant families are more likely influenced by transnational gender norms that they brought from their home country. Factors that perpetuate male dominance gender norms are men's attitudes, women's internalized oppression, and the community's role. Such male-dominant gender norms trigger marital conflicts whenever women strive to exercise their rights, like participating in paid jobs, education, and decision-making.

Similarly, the traditional gender norms had negatively influenced women's empowerment. As presented in the findings and discussion, a couple with traditional gender norms hinder women's consciousness-raising, post-secondary education attendance, and involvement in paid

employment. The findings demonstrated that the increase in women's consciousness and higher-level education had enhanced women's probability of finding a higher position jobs with increased earnings. Hence, women's empowerment enhances women's degree of autonomy and decision-making power on family matters that in turn cause conflict with spouses with traditional marital relationships. As narrated in the findings and discussion, women with high employment positions and high earnings are the best indicators of women's beliefs about gender-role equality.

On the contrary, immigrant women that have a lower education level, less consciousness, and no employment opportunity are the victims of male dominance and traditional gender norms. Such women have been vulnerable to internalized oppressive norms, male-dominant attitudes and practices, and traditional norms perpetuated by the communities. Therefore, women's empowerment is one factor for gender norms change and can also however, increases the possibility of marital instability among Ethiopian spouses who practice traditional relationships.

The other essential finding is the impact of *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation on marriage, which either positively or negatively impacted marriage. The finding revealed that *Jarsummaa*/mediation could be very helpful in de-escalating the conflict and raising the couples' consciousness. In addition, *Jarsummaa*/mediation could enable the spouse to adapt to embrace egalitarian relationships. *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation is a social support system that values the family's emotional, psychological state, and honors and considers all these values in mediating marital conflicts. The participants described that the motive of *Jarusammaa*/mediation is reconciliation and ensuring accountability through the community justice system. *Jarsummaa*/mediation holds the abuser accountable to the community, not only to the person he has victimized. For example, the abusers were held responsible and accountable if they did not accept the recommendation and suggestion of the *Manguddoos*/elders. Therefore, they are

punished by ostracizing and banishing them from the social support system the community has provided them. The ultimate goal of *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation is to protect the family and children from the trauma and depression caused by marital conflict, separation, and divorce. Therefore, *Jarsummaa*/mediation had positively impacted the marital relationship when it addressed the cause of the conflicts. It also protected the family, most importantly, the children.

*Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation; however, might not be free of the male-dominant culture, especially when the elected *Manguddoos*/elders coerce women to wait in abusive marital relationships. Therefore, *Jarsummaa*/mediation has a probability of serving as a mechanism of the social control system and further perpetuating the women's oppression unless it is emancipated from male-dominant cultural norms. In addition, some participants explained that *Jarsummaa*/mediation could pressure the spouses to compromise their individual rights and interests to accommodate the family's interests. In this case, *Jarsummaa*/mediation coerces women to wait in abusive relationships, but the conflict will eventually arise and cause family instability unless the problem is solved well. However, despite the weakness discussed above, I still believe that the advantages or positive qualities of *Jaarsummaa*/traditional mediation vastly outweigh its negative side in finding the middle ground. Hence, by emancipating *Jarsummaa*/mediation it is possible to change to be the best indigenous institution that could offer the needed social support system in resolving marital conflict among Ethiopian immigrant communities.

Indirectly *Jarsummaa*/traditional influences and is also affected by the Canadian legal system when mediating marriages. The finding illustrated that the couples prefer to go to community mediation than seeking support from police officers, especially when the spouses want to keep their marriage. In addition, as described in the excerpts, the Canadian legal system supports couples to solve their marital conflict through such cultural mediation institutes. Therefore,



*Jarsummaa*/mediation serves as a shield and limits the legal intervention unless the elders violate the law and coerce the spouse to wait in the abusive relationship. If *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation emancipates itself from male-dominant norms, it enables the family to embrace egalitarian relationships which do not need legal interventions.

On the other hand, whenever *Jarsummaa*/mediation fell under the influence of traditional gender norms and used as a mechanism of social control, the existence and implementation of *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation could be questioned. Because *Jarsummaa*/mediation itself could be scrutinized by legal interventions as discussed by the participants when it violates a woman's rights. Furthermore, the participants explicitly described that if the *Jarsummaa*/traditional institution cannot be liberated, it could not continue to mediate the conflict in this country by coercing the women to wait in an abusive marital relationship. Hence, at this time, *Jarsummaa*/mediation is influenced by mainstream service providers and can be stopped from meditating conflicts.

The study participants also described that Canadian mainstream services providers impact gender norms change and marital relationships. Women's access to better rights and legal protections has considerable importance in women's consciousness raising. The study narrates that immigrant women have newfound rights that are antagonistic to culturally constructed male dominance norms that could impact marriage. Similarly, women's legal protection affected attitudes and behaviors that perpetuated male dominance gender norms, including traditional mediation. Whenever traditional gender norms strongly prevail in marital relationships, women are less likely to seek mainstream service providers. Rather, she might opt for traditional mediation that might shield the abuser and coerce women to wait in the abusive relationship. Therefore, even

though women have gained newfound freedom, the probability of exercising that freedom is highly impacted by traditional norms in a relationship and traditional mediation.

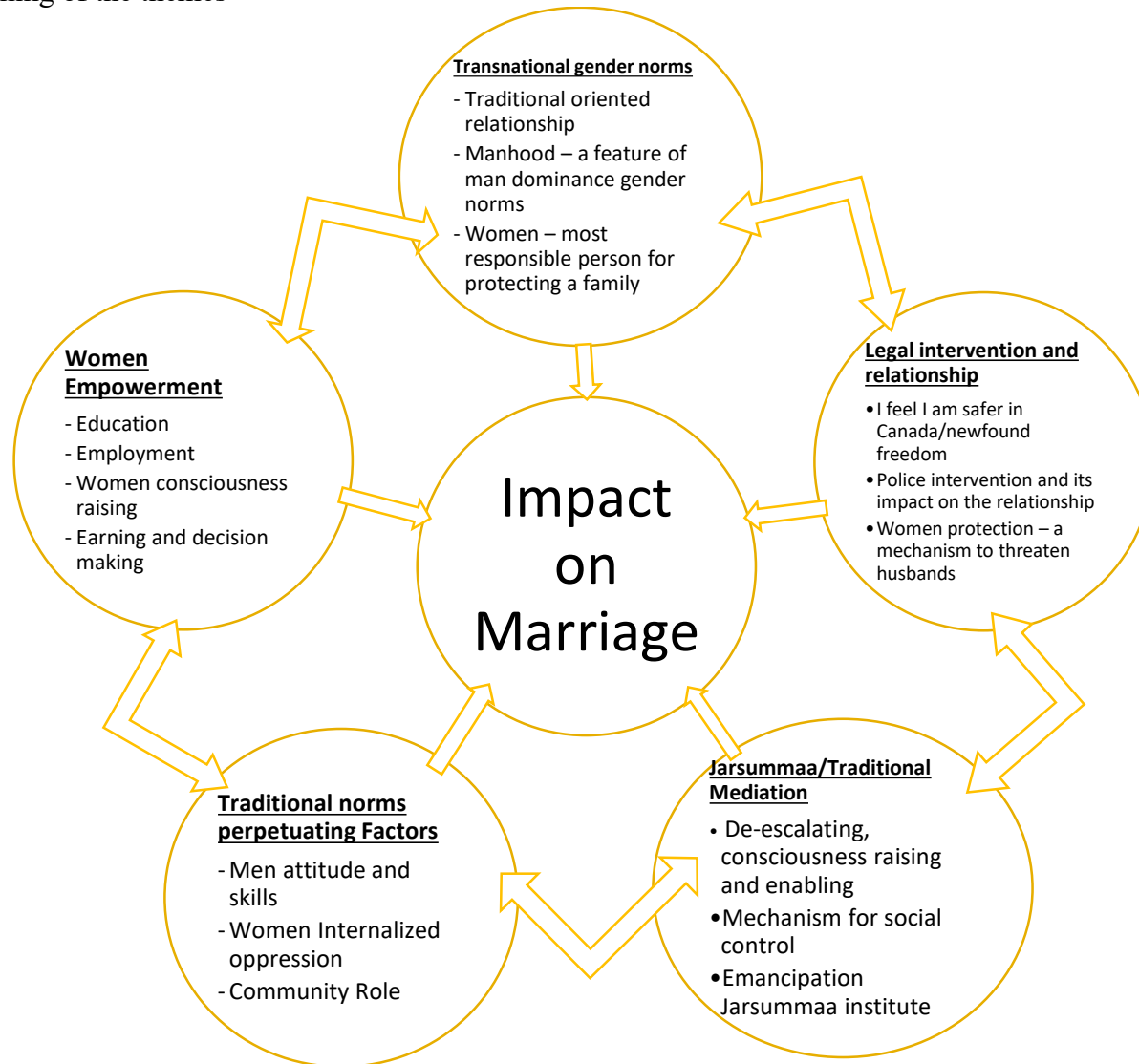
The study also indicated that when mainstream service providers like police officers are called into the conflicts, it is unlikely that communication is good enough between spouses to reconcile the marriage after that. Therefore, women did not want to call the police for help for two reasons. The first one is that they want to keep communication and to not cut off their children from their dad, and the second and most important one is because they want to protect their husbands from racist police officers. The participants describe calling the police officers on even an abusive partner is "putting their husband and children dad into trouble". They did not want their husbands brutalized by white police officers and the racist justice system even though they decided to divorce.

Overall, I do not support calling a police officer unless the husband is abusive because Black men are vulnerable to systemic racism. However, I would like the rule of law implemented on the basis of abuse, not by systemic racism against the Black people. Canadian and immigrant Ethiopians, including Black Africans, went through many challenges to improve their lives for spouses, children, and families. I hope immigrant families can get through such challenges where men's and women's rights are equally respected, and the justice system serves all people equally regardless of identity differences. Until then, traditional mediations institutions tied to immigrant families social and cultural backgrounds are the best solution for Ethiopian immigrant families with all its weaknesses.

Finally, it is important to note that traditional gender norms are not only specific problems for spouses of Ethiopian immigrants or African men. In western developed countries, the patriarchal lifestyle is one of the manifestations that perpetuate social injustice, which imposes

men's interest over women. Some white men adhere to traditional gender norms, which could create conflicts and difficulties in marital relationships, although they live in communities that embrace egalitarian relationships. Eagly et al. (2019) claimed that despite substantial changes in employment and education and a shift to egalitarian behaviours, gender stereotypes continue with an uneven division of wage and homework between men and women in developed countries. Therefore, it is important that African men and specifically Ethiopian men are not stereotyped. In summary, the study of immigrant marriage is encircled by the influence of traditional gender norms, women empowerment, male dominance norms as perpetuating factors, traditional mediation, and legal intervention. Hence all the themes are synthesized in the following diagram, with marriage at the center of the themes.

Figure 2: The intertwining of the themes



## **5.2. Reflection of my perspectives, thoughts, and feelings**

I used field journaling during the data collection stage to reflect on my perspectives, feelings, and thoughts. I maintained journaling throughout the report writing. When I started conducting the interviews and discussions with each participant, I think the participants felt skeptical about why I was conducting this study even though I explained details when they signed the consent forms. Self-introduction and demographic questions allowed us to clear the feelings of fear with the participants. I felt the participants became more comfortable after answering the demographic questions.

I had different feelings and thoughts when I interviewed each participant because of their gender and marital status. When I conducted interviews with the two married men, I was very comfortable discussing the marital relationship issues. However, I felt we were sharing our own problems with each other. Because we are from similar cultural backgrounds, gender stereotypes, married and discussed our mess literally. I question myself when can we change. What would be done to decolonize ourselves from traditional gender norms as Ethiopian men? We changed to Canadian resident and citizenship, but we held traditional male-dominance gender norms and continued abusing our wives. I do not understand why women protect men from white police officers' racist abuse while we are abusing them at home. The interviews and discussions I had with the two married men seemed we were confessing our sins.

While interviewing the two divorced/separated women, I was very frustrated by hearing such abuse. But I found the women were very strong to discuss and change something in their lives. In the middle of our discussion, Lalistu Margaa said, "Dinku, I am so sorry if I affected your feeling, but I want to tell you what I feel about Ethiopia men. I do not think Ethiopian men can be changed at all." That was like slapping me in my face or putting a heavy weight on me. She said

women have changed, doing paid jobs to contribute to the household economy, but men are not. At the end of the interview, I thanked her for her time and sharing her experience with me and closed the audio recording. But after I finished the interview and closed the recording, she said, "first, I did not want to tell you all my problems, but now I found this is the right time to share with you and people who want to learn and understand how an immigrant man oppresses his wife. I have a story to tell you." I said okay. Then I restarted a part two interview recording. In part two interview, she told me that her ex-husband refused to buy her and her daughter a pair of winter shoes while he received welfare money from the government in the name of her and her daughter. If she did not tell me this story, I would have missed the best story of this study that shows the level of abuse of immigrant women by their spouses.

After hearing Lalistu's story, I asked myself, "why I am torturing myself by hearing such kind of women's agony when I cannot change anything." I wanted to quit doing this thesis and go back to be a non-thesis student. But I could not anymore because the time for adding and dropping courses was already passed. So, I continued torturing myself while doing interviews, transcription, analysis, and report writing. However, Lalistu Margaa finally won all those challenges and stood up by herself. She said to me, Dinku, "now I am making money, helping myself and my family, and paying tax to the government. I am getting stronger and stronger from time to time. I feel I am more protected." WOW! I congratulated Lalistu Margaa.

Each participant had their own experience to share with me. I kept torturing myself again by hearing about the experience of Dhala Namaa. She said, "all I want in this world is to make my children happy. But my husband thinks about making money as much as possible." I said to myself, "your husband is not a smart guy." If he had helped her, they could have made more money. Because when she worked a paid job, she could contribute more to the household economy. I

started daily journaling after I finished the interview with Dhala Namaa. I do not understand why only women are more responsible for taking care of kids. She said she suffered a lot to protect her children. What commitment and dedication while her husband abuses her at home. On the other side, her husband's priority is money. I felt her husband and Dhala Namaa were two people living together with two different goals and building two houses. To be honest, I was afraid to see my wife. But, of course, my wife used to work in the Federal Ministry of Health in Ethiopia as a team leader, and she was well paid. She is a degree graduate. She is only one year in Canada, and now she is studying. However, I felt I was part of the abuse.

I continued torturing myself. But in this case, I discussed with Urjii Barii, the woman who had already fought against male-dominant gender norms. I started to introduce myself and the purpose of my study to Urjii Barii. Before I started the interview, she asked me one question. She said, "why do you want to study the problems of changing gender norms among Ethiopian immigrants." That question was like shooting a missile at me. I did not have a precise answer except explaining the purpose of the study. She continued, "I mean, I appreciate your motivation, but you are an Ethiopian man, and I wonder why you wanted to study women's oppression." That was extensive torture to me again. I said something. But I did not exactly know what I said. However, I was pretty much sure my answer was not satisfactory for her question. She did not ask me another question again. Urjii Barii and I chuckled a little bit and went directly to our discussion.

I congratulated Urjii Barii because her husband is such an egalitarian man. Urjii Barii provided insights into the challenging situations immigrant women are experiencing. She said she had mediated marital conflicts and saw different kinds of women's oppression by their spouses. I asked her one last question. I was very emotional when I asked this question. I said, "why do you mediate marriages? Why did you sit *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation and mediate instead of

reporting to the police?" She responded, "what can we do? They want mediation. Even the women want mediation than reporting their husbands to the police officers. I can tell you we are doing the most arduous work."

I asked myself, "why did I choose this topic?" I have an easy answer this time "to torture myself." Urjii Barii shared her perspectives about changing gender norms. She came up with a thoughtful solution to changing gender norms problems with which a husband and wife can live. She said, "my husband cooked food because he did not want to be dependent on a woman. So, the solution for ingrained male-dominant gender norms is that men need to be independent from women to eat food, and women must be decolonized themselves from internalized oppression." I have this in my mind and tell people now. I have got some relief from torturing myself. Because I have a fantastic slogan, **"men must liberate themselves from women, and women must decolonize themselves from self-defeating behaviours."**

Finally, it is important to note that all Ethiopian men are not abusive. I can witness many more Ethiopian husbands who care for their wives and children even in Ethiopia. Therefore, I would like to reiterate this study cannot represent all Ethiopian men living in Canada.

### **5.3. Limitation and Strength of the Research**

This research was conducted during the COVID-19 lockdown. The imposed restrictions did not allow conducting in-person interviews with the participants. Therefore, it was impossible to capture the feelings and emotions through participants' observation. The other most important thing is that because the marital relationships information needed to remain confidential, the focus group discussion method was not used to collect qualitative data.

The study was designed to collect data from six married and divorced participants and equal numbers of men and women participants. However, the semi-structured interviews were



conducted only to five participants. Recruiting the needed numbers and participants' diversity was challenging, indicating that marital issues are still stigmatized although the researcher was from the same cultural background as the research participants.

More importantly, neither divorced nor separated men participated in the study, despite expecting divorced/separated men to share their experience for a researcher of similar gender identity and cultural background. Thus, this study is not able to include the perspective of divorced or separated husbands, while one divorced and one separated women's view were included in the study. Therefore, utilizing this study's findings needs to consider such limitations carefully.

On the other hand, because I grew up in similar gender norms and cultural backgrounds, it enriched the study's findings by allowing the participants to comfortably share their experiences and perspectives with their native languages. In addition, discussing ideas and terms using contextual words and examples helped participants easily understand the questions and share their experiences. Furthermore, the recruitment of participants who had experience in mediating marital conflict of Ethiopian immigrants also enriched the study by sharing their own experiences and the experiences of the spouses they had mediated.

#### **5.4. Future research recommendation**

This study explored the experiences of five immigrant Ethiopians married and divorced families living in Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph, using semi-structured interviews. Participants narrated and discussed their experiences and various factors connected to gender norms change and traditional mediation, which affect immigrant marital relationships in Canada.

This could be designed in more depth to include more participants over an extended period. In addition, during qualitative data collection, my interaction with the participants triggered various research questions and topics of interest that could be approached with qualitative, quantitative, or

mixed-method study designs. Hence, the following are some of the research topics that could be further studied.

The first area I recommend to study is how can we emancipate traditional family mediation to enhance its contribution in solving marital conflicts? I want to use mixed-method study to collect qualitative and quantitative data to understand what has to be done by various partners to change traditional mediation/*Jarsummaa* institution to be more inclusive support system for the immigrant community. I want to conduct this study in a way that it adds knowledge and clear understanding to the existing literature of immigrant communities' support systems that have already been isolated from their social base.

Secondly, I want to specifically look at the impact of conflicts triggered by gender norms change on the mental health of spouses and children among Ethiopian immigrant families in Canada. For example, the participants of this study had explicitly discussed that spouses seek mediation to continue marriage to keep family relationships to protect the spouses and children from emotional, psychological, and social problems. However, even though traditional mediation has helped the spouse to compromise and reconcile their problems to wait in the marital relationships, not all marriages continue undisrupted. Hence, I wanted to conduct a mixed-method study to understand the mental health impact of marital disruptions triggered by changes in gender norms among immigrant families living in Canada.

Finally, I wanted to specifically explore the impact of legal intervention on immigrants' marital relationships. Although mainstream service providers protect women from abusive relationships, the study participants described that legal system interferences were not taken lightly by spouses due to Black men being abused by the racist justice system. The mainstream service providers like police officers contributed a lot when the safety of women was compromised in the

relationships, but women do not report the full context of the abuse they are experiencing. Hence, I want to conduct a qualitative study on what would be done to harmonize the mainstream service providers as a robust support system to solve immigrant community marital conflicts.

### **5.5. Implications of findings**

Through this study, it was clear that gender norms changes have impacted Ethiopian immigrants' spouses' marital relationships. Immigrant husbands and wives could be driven into conflicts when women's role change from homemakers to economic contributors and women can exercise better freedom when men did not acknowledge such changes. Such changes might be a cultural shock for men from traditional gender norms relationships and still believe in gender stereotype work divisions. Many factors that potentially could trigger conflict between couples were elicited in this study.

Problems due to shift in gender norms can be addressed by decolonizing from male-dominated traditional norms. Men must take affirmative actions to change our thinking with the changing world. Speaking as an Ethiopian man, I wanted to strongly suggest we must change. We must care for our wives, children, and most importantly ourselves. Any problem we created hurts us first. Women can survive. Lalistu Margaa and Dhala Namaa are the living witness that they overcame those challenges. However, we are struggling with cooking the food we eat, washing the clothes we wear, and cleaning the room we live in. We are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the world is very dynamic. Migration is one of the demographic factors that influence human thinking. Therefore, it is important to adjust our attitude and behavior to the norms and the world we live in. Otherwise, I feel men cannot continue oppressing their wives in Canada anymore. We are living in a democratic country, but we are the victims of our own thinking.

Women too, how long can they shoulder all the problems. There must be a limit for everything. They should not be vulnerable for internalized oppression. First, they must decolonize themselves from self-defeating beliefs. Then, these abuses can be stopped at some point. Change starts from inside, from the abused. Ethiopian immigrant women must believe that they can change something. Thus, take an affirmative action, and start reporting the abuse as a last resort, so that it can be a lesson for other men.

On the other hand, even if the social work profession plays a crucial role in family crises therapy, only traditional mediators and some mainstream service providers like police officers, housing agencies and caseworkers that works closely with police officers had an active role in addressing problems that arise because of gender norms changes among the immigrants. However, those listed agencies and traditional mediation like *Jarsummaa* institutions have gaps that the field of social work could contribute more to fill.

Given that spouses had struggled with changing lifestyle to egalitarian relationships, women's rights, and handling marital conflict, social work practice can contribute to spouses' consciousness-raising and empowerment by facilitating orientations with agencies like (Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and other related service providers. Immigrant women empowerment is still an unfinished assignment requiring strong partnership with service giving organizations like language skill training centers, short-term skill training, employment agencies. The implication of my findings for social work practice on gender norms change for migrants go beyond Canada as the challenges started in the refugee camps after the immigrant fled from their country of origin. In Canada and other countries, social work should work closely with Immigration and Refugee Agencies and United Nations High Commission for Refugees to provide

enough consciousness-raising services in the refugee camps and after the immigrants have resided in the host countries.

Considering that traditional mediation institutions serve as a mechanism of social control, the social work practice philosophy allows working closely with immigrant communities and indirectly addressing such valuable cultural institutions and emancipating them from male-dominant gender norms. It is possible to provide capacity-building training on cultural integration to the immigrant community. Such training might offer the participants the opportunity to discuss changing gender norms and existing social support systems in the community and form a partnership with mainstream service providers to enhance the benefits of traditional mediation institutions. Therefore, social workers can contribute more to empower such traditional institutions so that coercing women to wait into abusive marital relationships could be no more a problem. The importance of working closely with such traditional mediation institutions creates opportunities to address factors that perpetuate male dominance gender norms in the community. Hence, social work in Canada and other Western countries can exploit the positive impact of *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation and other socially, culturally, and spiritually valuable institutions to help the immigrant spouses to smooth the transition to egalitarian marital relationships.

Regarding systemic racism against Black men, social worker professionals need to promote a fair justice system irrespective of race, gender, religion, and other identities. In addition, social workers need to contribute to the dialogue on the challenges of systemic racism at the macro level so that the justice system is no more a threat to Black men. For example, the finding of my study indicated that women think calling a police officer on husbands is putting them in trouble situation even though they decided to divorce because they knew the justice system would further abuse

their husbands. Such institutionalized racism needs to be addressed. Hence, the transformation of the justice system can help immigrant women report domestic abuses to the service provider to solve the problem positively rather than as a shield for perpetuating racism abuse on Black men.

The policy implication from my study that I want to put forward is for governmental, local, and international non-governmental organizations working with the migrants to consider incorporating gender norms change issues in immigrant integration and settlement programs. The other policy implication of this study is designing policies and programs in adopting socially, culturally, and spiritually friendly services to the immigrant communities. Indeed, Canada is considered as one of the most diversified countries in the world. It is important to note that acknowledging and empowering socially constructed institutions like *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation can be helpful as they influence the immigrant community in exercising anti-oppressive practices in marital relationships.

This study contributes to the literature by exploring the gender norms change and traditional mediation impact on marriages on immigrant spouses living in Canada and Western developed countries. Examining the experiences of women's participation in paid jobs and spouse's household chores responsibility-sharing among Ethiopian immigrants' families living in Canada adds understanding and knowledge to the existing literature. This study adds to the knowledge of previous studies such as Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2019), Hyman et al. (2008), Connor et al. (2016), Boyle and Ali (2016) the challenges of third world immigrants' spouses in exercising egalitarian-oriented relationships in Western countries. It provides more understanding of marital conflicts due to changing gender norms' impact on marriage because of migration and women's empowerment. This study contributes to the scholarly literature on the tensions that arises in marriage because of transnational male dominance norms and women's emancipation due to access

to different social and economic support in the host countries. It also contributes to the knowledge of how immigrant communities establish transnational cultural support systems like *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediations in host countries to solve marital conflict to fill the gap created because of disconnection from the extended families' support.

The study presents the participants' experiences and perspectives to understand factors that perpetuate male dominance gender norms, which contribute to women's oppression and trigger marital conflicts among immigrant couples. My study significantly contributes to understanding the complexity of immigrant marriage under continuous pressure due to transnational male dominance gender norms, women empowerment, community-based traditional mediations, mainstream service providers, and traditional male-dominant norms attitudes and behaviors.

The other strong contribution of the study is introducing the appropriateness of traditional mediation for family conflicts, although it has weaknesses. My study affirmed that the immigrant community has their traditional way of dealing with marital conflicts, like *Jarsummaa*/traditional mediation institution of Ethiopian immigrants. Existing literature indicated that immigrant women seek traditional meditation instead of reporting marital conflicts to the mainstream service providers mainly because they are afraid that Black men are scrutinized and vulnerable for racist abuse by some white police officers (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019, Hyman et al. 2008, Connor et al. 2016). However, this study further contributed to understanding the existence of culturally oriented traditional mediation institutions/*Jarsummaa* that have provided social, emotional, and psychological support for immigrant Ethiopians isolated from their social base due to migration. Such a unique traditional institution which provides support to the immigrant community in their native language, spiritually and culturally appropriate background, and led by very respected community members, is not particular to the Ethiopian immigrant. Every immigrant community

in Canada and Western developed countries could have a similar culturally constructed strong traditional mediation institutions which social work practice can enrich to make it a valuable asset to immigrants.



## **APPENDIXES**

### **Appendix – A: Participants informed consent statement**

**Title of Project:** "Biyyaa Baanus Biyyi Nu Keessaa Hinbaatu: Changing Gender Norms and Traditional Mediation Impact on Marriage among Ethiopia Immigrants in Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph"

**Principal Investigator:** Dinku Korsa --- MSW Candidate at Wilfrid Laurier University.

**Advisor(s)/supervisor(s):** Dr. Cheryl-Anne Cait MSW, RSW, PhD Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Work Wilfrid Laurier University

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine gender norms changes and the absence of cultural disputes mediation on marriage among Ethiopian immigrants living in Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph. The researcher is Dinku Korsa, a Laurier graduate student in the Faculty of Social Work, working under the supervision of Dr. Cheryl-Anne Cait (Ph.D).

#### **Information**

The principal investigator will be meeting with approximately both married and divorced participants. You may be one of the eligible participants for the interview.

I am going to ask you some questions about gender norms changes and its impact on your marriage.

Gender norms changes in this context refer to gender related tasks and power distribution of the spouses of the spouses in the family that might challenge your belief in taking responsibilities on child rearing, cooking, cleaning, laundry, and financial support. Also, absence of cultural mediation in this context is the non-existence of extended family meditation for the conflict that arose between spouses.

If you agree to participate in this research, the interview will be audio recorded to capture our discussions. But only the research and the supervisor will have access to the recording. The recording will be transcribed by handwriting to aid the translation to English. Then the transcription will be translated and typed in the computer. Finally, the transcription will be shredded and destroyed once the research is completed by August 2022. The translation will also be deleted the same way once the research is complete by August 2022. The principal investigator will also take notes during the interview. These will also be destroyed by August 2022.

Participation is absolutely voluntary, but you have to sign the consent form that you have voluntarily participated in this study if you agree to participate. You are not obliged to join the study because the researcher is an active member of the community. If you feel discomfort with the questions, you have full right to not answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any point. If you choose to withdraw from the study, information (audio-recorded interview and transcript) will be destroyed.

The study will take about 90 to 120 minutes to complete. Data from approximately --- research participants that are immigrants from Ethiopia and currently married or divorced will be collected for this study.

In order to participate in this study, you will need to have a computer or cellphone device and an internet connection. As well you will need to find a silent room so that you are not disturbed during the interview.

## **Risks**

As a result of your participation in this study, you may experience uncomfortable moments in discussing your marriage. The following safeguards will be used to minimize the discomfort. You are free to not answer any question.

The participants' identities will not be disclosed to protect participants' confidentiality; instead, pseudonyms will be used for data analysis and presentation of findings.

Nobody will access the researcher's devices except the researcher and supervisor. They will be kept under lock and key.

Only the researcher and research supervisor will have access to the transcription to check the data analysis process.

You are free to discontinue the study at any time and to choose not to respond to any question *without loss of compensation*.

### **Benefits**

The research will contribute to the body of literature/knowledge and will help us understand how gender norms change in the absence of extended family mediation can affect marriage and to support the efforts to address these challenges among Ethiopian immigrants' community. Married people may share their experiences about how they handle gender norms changes and how they manage family disputes. On the other hand, separated/divorced people will share the influence of gender norms change and the absence of the cultural extended family mediation that could help learning from their experiences.

### **Confidentiality and security of data**

The confidentiality of your data will be ensured by not disclosing your personal information to any one at any circumstance except the principal investigator and the supervisor, using pseudonyms. The data will be stored in a locked office /on a password protected computer/ on a password-protected recording device located at the investigator room. In addition, the files will be stored in OneDrive for business used at Laurier and shared with the supervisor through the OneDrive to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of research participants. Nobody can access it

at any circumstance. Data from the study which will include transcription, translation and notes taken during the interview will be destroyed by Dinku Korsu once the research is completed by August 2022.

### **Compensation**

For participating in this study, you will receive a compensation of \$25.00 gift card. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will still receive this gift card.

### **Contact**

Suppose you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study. In that case, you may contact the researcher, Dinku Korsu, at [kors4930@mylaurier.ca](mailto:kors4930@mylaurier.ca) or 437-778-8306.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board (REB# 6997). If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Jayne Kalmar, Ph.D., Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 3131 or [REBChair@wlu.ca](mailto:REBChair@wlu.ca).

### **Participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. Because the researcher is an active member of the community, you are not obliged to join the study even though you might wish not to disclose your personal information. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer any question.

If you withdraw from the study, your data will be removed/destroyed by the researcher right away.

## **Feedback and Publication**

The results of this research will be published/presented in a thesis, course project report, book, journal article, conference presentation, class presentation. Thus, your direct quotations with your consent might also be used in publication/presentation, project report, book, journal article, class presentation, and conference presentation. But your personal information or information of persons you mentioned in this interview will remain confidential.

## **Consent**

### **WRITTEN CONSENT OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

#### **READ AND CHECK OFF:**

Do you agree that:

You have read (or the researcher has read to you) and understood the information provided on this consent statement as described herein

☐ Yes      ☐ No

You understand the potential risks and discomforts involved.

☐ Yes      ☐ No

Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction.

☐ Yes      ☐ No

Do you agree to participate in the study?

☐ Yes      ☐ No

Do you agree to be audio-taped during the interview?

☐ Yes      ☐ No

Do you agree to have your quotations used in publications so long as they do not identify you or other people you mention in this interview?

☐ Yes      ☐ No

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant (please print)	Signature of Participant	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher (please print)	Signature of Researcher	Date

Please print, sign, scan and emails this consent form to [kors4930@mylaurier.ca](mailto:kors4930@mylaurier.ca).

Note: This project has been reviewed and approved by Wilfrid Laurier University Research  
Ethics Board #6997.

## **Appendix – B - Flyer to recruit the participants**

### **You Are Invited to Participate in a Research Study!**

Immigrants Family Crises: The Impact of Gender Norms Changes and Absence of Cultural Family Disputes Mediation on Marriage Among Ethiopian Immigrants Living in Kitchener, Waterloo and Guelph cities.

- *Are you an adult Immigrant from Ethiopia living in Kitchener, Waterloo, or Guelph?*
- *Are you currently married or divorced?*

***If so, you are invited to participate in this study.***

### **What is the study about?**

This study explores the impact of the change in gender norms and the absence of cultural mediation on marriage among Ethiopian immigrants living in Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph.

This study will enhance the knowledge of how the married spouses overcome gender norms changes and handle the disputes on the one hand, and how the gender norms changes in the absence of extended family mediation can contribute to divorce on the other hand. Your efforts will help the Immigrants learn to adapt smoothly and live without the cultural shock the spouses may encounter concerning gender norms changes.

Come and share your experiences with the Ethiopian researcher via a university-approved web-based one-on-one interview tool.

### **Who is running the study?**

Dinku Mekonnen Korsu, an MSW Candidate at the Faculty of Social Work at Laurier University, Kitchener, Ontario, is conducting this study as partial fulfillment of his MSW. The interview will take approximately 90 to 120 minutes. In addition, a compensation of \$25 that is

compatible with what you would be missing from paid work due to participating in the interview will be provided.

### **Contact**

For more information about participating in this research and/or pre-screening, please contact Dinku Korsa at [kors4930@mylaurier.ca](mailto:kors4930@mylaurier.ca).

Thank you in advance for your time and interest!

**This project has been reviewed and approved by Wilfrid Laurier University Research  
Ethics Board #6997.**



### **Appendix-C: Semi-structured Interview guiding questions**

1. Your name
2. Age
3. Sex
4. Can you tell me about yourself (when you come to Canada, how long have you been in Canada?)
5. Are you married? How many years have you been married?)
6. Are you married after you migrated to Canada or before?
7. Do you have a child? How many children do you have?
8. Your level of education? Did you attend post-secondary education?
9. Tell me about how you and your partner share family responsibilities at homework?

#### **❖ For married participants**

10. What are your thoughts on sharing responsibilities at homework, i.e., taking care of kids, cooking, cleaning, and laundry, affect your relationship with your spouse?
11. Have you and your partner ever been in dispute? What was the cause? How did you solve it?
12. What are your thoughts about changes in income, education and decision-making power on family matters have contributed to family dispute?
13. Do you have someone you have talked to solve the disputes? How has that helped maintain a positive relationship in your marriage?
14. What are your thoughts about the role of the traditional family conflict mediation?

#### **❖ For divorced participants**

15. How has your relationship changed with your partner?
16. What are your thoughts on sharing responsibilities at homework, i.e., taking care of kids, cooking, cleaning, and laundry, affect your relationship with your spouse?

17. How might changes in income, education, and decision-making power on family matters have contributed to your separation/divorce?
18. Had you talked to or been consulted by any of your friends and relatives before your decision to get divorced? If your answer is yes, please tell me about the process.
19. What are your thoughts about the role of the absence of traditional family mediation and its impact on marriage?

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