

Unit Four

Marginalized, Minorities, and Vulnerable Groups

4.1 Definition of concepts

- ❑ ***What is marginalization?*** Marginalization is defined as a treatment of a person or social group as minor, insignificant or peripheral.
- Marginalization involves exclusion of certain groups from social interactions, marriage relations, sharing food and drinks, and working and living together.

❑ ***Who are mostly marginalized?*** There are marginalized social groups in every society and culture. Women, children, older people, and people with disabilities are among marginalized groups across the world.

- The nature and level of marginalization varies from society to society as a result of cultural diversity.
- Religious, ethnic, and racial minorities are also among social groups marginalized in different societies and cultures.
- Crafts workers such as tanners (one that tans hides), potters, and ironsmiths are marginalized in many parts of Ethiopia.

- ❑ ***What is vulnerability?*** Vulnerability refers to the state of being exposed to physical or emotional injuries.
- Vulnerable groups are people exposed to possibilities of attack, harms or mistreatment.
 - As a result, vulnerable persons/groups need special attention, protection and support. For example, children and people with disabilities need special support and protection as they are exposed to risks and neglect because of their age and disabilities. Universities have introduced special needs education for students with disabilities to give them special support.

❑ **Minority groups:** The phrase 'minority group' refers to a small group of people within a community, region, or country.

- In most cases, minority groups are different from the majority population in terms of race, religion, ethnicity, and language. For example, black Americans are minorities in the United States of America. Christians could be minorities in a Muslim majority country. Muslims can be minorities in a predominantly Hindu society. Hence, minority groups can be ethnic minorities, religious minorities, or racial minorities in a given community, region of country.
- There are different forms of marginalization. In this chapter we will discuss issues related to occupational, age and gender-based marginalization.

4.2 Gender-based marginalization

- Gender inequality involves discrimination on a group of people based on their gender.
- Gender inequality mainly arises from socio-cultural norms. The manifestations of gender inequality vary from culture to culture. Girls and women face negative discrimination in societies across the world. Women are exposed to social and economic inequalities involving unfair distribution of wealth, income and job opportunities.

- Gender-based marginalization is a global problem. It involves exclusion of girls and women from a wide range of opportunities and social services.
- Gender disparities in education is a good example.
- Girls in developing countries, especially those who live in remote and rural areas, are excluded from formal education.
- The enrollment of girls in higher education is much lower than that of boys. Women do not enjoy equal employment opportunities. They do not have equal rights in terms of property ownership and inheritance.
- Women and girls are also vulnerable to gender-based violence such as rape, early/child marriage, abduction/forced marriage, domestic violence and female genital cutting/mutilation.

- There are some customary practices that affect the health and wellbeing of girls and women. These practices collectively are called harmful traditional practices (HTPs).
- We will discuss two examples: early/child marriage and female circumcision, also called female genital cutting/mutilation.
- Let us begin with female genital cutting, which is widely practiced in most regions of Ethiopia.

A. Female genital cutting

- Female genital cutting (FGC) is practiced in 28 countries in western, northern and eastern Africa.
- The prevalence of FGC is very high in Somalia (98%), Djibouti (93%), Egypt (87%), Sudan (87%), and Eritrea (83%).
- Ethiopia is one of the high prevalence countries in Africa. According to recent reports, 65% of girls and women in 15 to 49 years' age category are circumcised (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2017).

- **Health impacts of female genital cutting**
- There are four major types of FGC. They are Type I (clitoridectomy), Type II (excision), Type III (infibulation), and Type IV (all the rest).
- The first three types of FGC are practiced in Ethiopia.
- Harms of FGC vary because the types of FGC practiced in different regions and cultural settings are different.
- Type III (also called infibulation or phraonic) is the most severe form of FGC. This type of FGC is widely practiced in the Somali, Afar, and Harari regions.
- **Short term and long-term implications** for the health of girls and women including **severe bleeding, infections, pain during sexual intercourse, delivery complications, and fistula. The impacts also include psychological trauma.**

- **Factors that encourage female genital cutting**
- The prevalence of FGC has been declining in Ethiopia. However, it is still practiced in most of the regions in the country. Why do people practice FGC? The practice is sustained for some reasons:
 - 1) people consider it as an integral part of their culture; and
 - 2) people believe that the practice has some benefits.

❑ **The following are some of the beliefs related to the practice:**

- I. **FGC is considered as a process of purifying girls.** In some cultures, uncircumcised girls/women are considered as impure. According to local beliefs, marriage to uncircumcised girls would bring misfortunes such as illness, infertility, and conflict. Hence, girls must be circumcised to be clean and ready for marriage.
- II. **Uncircumcised girls would be disobedient (noncompliant),** powerful and ill-mannered. In some parts of Ethiopia, people believe that uncircumcised girls tend to destroy household utensils.
- III. There is a widely held belief that **uncircumcised girls are promiscuous (immoral)** because they have high sexual drive. Some people believe that marriage to uncircumcised girls/women would not be stable and long-lasting.
- IV. **FGC is also considered as a means of preserving girls' virginity,** which is considered as a precondition for marriage in some cultures.

- Female genital cutting is sustained and enforced by **social expectations and norms**. Girls and parents who decide to abandon the practice would be subject to social sanctions.
- **The following are examples:**
 - ✓ **Social exclusion and marginalization:** Community members would exclude uncut girls and women from a wide range of social relations and interactions.
 - ✓ **Gossip (talk, chat) and insult:** community members, including peer groups, boys, women and men, put pressure on uncircumcised girls and their parents through gossiping and insulting.
 - ✓ **In some parts of Ethiopia, men do not marry uncircumcised girls.** As a result, uncircumcised girls are excluded from marriage opportunities and love relationships.
 - ✓ **In some parts of the country, people do not eat food cooked by uncircumcised girls.** Uncircumcised girls/women are not also allowed to join other people for prayer. This is because uncut girls are labeled as impure.

B. Early/child marriage: Early marriage refers to marriage which involves girls below the age of 18.

- The prevalence of early marriage is declining in Ethiopia and other African countries. However, it is still widely practiced in different regions of Ethiopia.
- According to international human rights conventions, early marriage is regarded as violation of the rights of the child.
- **Early marriage has the following major harmful consequences:**
 - ✓ Young girls enter into marital relation when they are too young to give their consent to get married.
 - ✓ Early marriage inhibits girls' personal development; it hinders girls' chance to education and future professional development.
 - ✓ Early marriage exposes young girls to sexual abuse by their older husbands.
 - ✓ Early marriage leads to early pregnancies, which increases risks of diseases and complications during delivery, fistula, and death of the mother or child.

- Child marriage is an illegal practice according to the Criminal Code of Ethiopia. Despite this legal restriction, however, early marriage is still practiced in different regions of the country.
- **Factors encouraging early marriage:** According to study findings, there are various factors that drive early marriage. **Social norms and economic factors are the two major drivers of the practice.**
- ***Social norms:*** **Social norms contribute a lot for the continuation of early marriage in many parts of the world. Chastity** (the state of not having sex with anyone) of girls is one of the social norms that influence parents and relatives to protecting girls from pre-marital sex.
- **The value attached to virginity is another driver of early marriage.** Girl's reputation (character, standing) and family social status are associated with sexual purity of girls.

- Parents incline to marry off their daughter before the girl reach at the stage of poverty to avoid the possibility of pre-marital sex and love affair.
- Community members influence unmarried teen-age girls to get married as early as possible. They do this through social pressure including insulting unmarried young girls. ***Komoker***, an Amharic term, is the widely used insult to ridicule girls considered to be late to get married.
- ***Economic factors*** are among the major factors that drive child marriage. In many areas of Ethiopia marriage provides economic security for young girls. Hence, parents, in some cases girls, support early marriage for economic benefits such as access to land and other resources. Parents' desire to get a good husband for their daughter is also another reason.

4.3 Marginalized occupational groups

- According to anthropological findings, **there are occupational marginalized groups in many parts of Ethiopia.**
- The following are marginalized occupational groups in our country: **tanners, potters, weavers and ironsmiths.**
- These craft-workers have different names in different parts of the country.
- Craft-workers such as potters and tanners are considered as impure and excluded from social interactions, ownership of economic resources (e.g., land), and participation in associations and celebrations.

- As noted above, marginalized occupation groups are people engaged in craftworks such as pottery, tannery, and iron works. Craft-workers in Ethiopia produce several articles such as traditional hand-woven clothes, household utensils, and farm tools.
- **Crafts workers lead a life of paradoxes (contradiction). They have important contributions to their communities; however, they are marginalized by the dominant and majority groups.**
- For examples, weavers **produce cultural clothes highly demanded by thousands** and millions of people. Many people use cultural clothes during annual celebrations, religious holidays, weddings, culture days, and mourning (sorrow). The demand of cultural dresses has been increasing in the last three decades. People dress cultural clothes in different occasions such as cultural festivals, days of nations and nationalities, and religious celebrations.
- **Despite their contributions, weavers are marginalized from the wider society.**

- **Ironsmiths are** among occupational groups marginalized in many cultural settings in Ethiopia.
- **Ironsmiths make and repair iron articles without using machines.** They contribute a lot especially in rural areas. **Ironsmiths serve rural communities by producing farming tools such as plough shares, sickles, and hoes.** Ethiopia families widely use household utensils (e.g., knives and axes) made by ironsmiths.
- **Tanners make leather products** that serve community members. Potters produce pottery articles essential for food processing and serving and fetching water.
- Despite their contributions, these craft-workers are considered inferior and marginalized from wide areas of social interactions.

- Marginalization of despised (hated) occupational groups is manifested in many ways in different parts of Ethiopia.
- Dena Freeman and Alula Pankhurst (2001), well-known anthropologists, identified different forms of marginalization targeting minority occupational groups.
- Some of them are summarized in the following table:

Type of marginalization	Manifestations of marginalization
Spatial marginalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craft-workers settle/live on the outskirts(peripheries') of villages, near to forests, on poor land, around steep slopes. • They are segregated at market places (they sell their goods at the outskirts or borders of markets). • When they walk along the road, they are expected to give way for others and walk on the lower side of the road.
Economic marginalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craft-workers are excluded from certain economic activities including production and exchanges. In some cultures, they are not allowed to cultivate crops. • They have a limited access to land and land ownership.

Social marginalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craft-workers are excluded from intermarriage; they do not share burial places with others; they are excluded from membership of associations such as iddirs. • When marginalized groups are allowed to participate in social events, they must sit on the floor separately-sometimes outside the house or near the door.
Cultural marginalization	<p>Cultural marginalization is manifested in negative stereotyping such as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupational minorities are labelled as impure and polluting; they are accused of eating animals that have died without being slaughtered; • Occupational minorities are also considered unreliable, lacking morality, respect and shame.

4.4 Age-based vulnerability

- What is age-based vulnerability? Age-based vulnerability is susceptibility/vulnerability/ of people, especially children and older people, to different forms of attack, physical injuries and emotional harms.
- For example, children and older people (people aged 60 and above) are exposed to possibilities of attack, harm and mistreatment because of their age.
- As a result, vulnerable persons/groups need special attention, protection and support. In this section, we discuss some example related to children and older people.

4.4.1 Children: Discrimination/vulnerability

- Children are among vulnerable groups exposed to harm because of their age.
- Both boys and girls are exposed to some harm and abuse in the hands of older people. However, girls are exposed to double marginalization and discrimination because of the gender.
- Child girls are exposed to various kinds of harm before they reach at the age of maturity. As discussed earlier in this chapter, girls are exposed to HTPs such as female genital cutting. Minor girls are also exposed to early/child marriage in many parts of Ethiopia.
- **Early/child marriage:** Early marriage refers to marriage which involves girls below the age of 18.

4.4.2 Marginalization of older persons

- We have discussed age-based marginalization considering the vulnerability of children. Age-based marginalization also affects older people. The phrase 'older people' refers to adults with the age of 60 and above.
- People's attitude towards older persons is changing over time in Ethiopia and all over the world. Older men and women have been respected across Ethiopian cultures.
- Older persons have been considered as custodians (guardians, defenders) of tradition, culture, and history.
- The role of older persons crucial in mentoring younger people, resolving disputes, and restoring peace across Ethiopian cultures.

- Situations are changing as family structures and living patterns are changing over time.
- Rural-urban migration, changes in values and life style, education and new employment opportunities lead to so many changes.
- Care and support for older people tend to decline as younger people migrate to urban areas and exposed to economic pressure and new life styles.
- Ageism is a widely observed social problem in the world. Ageism refer to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against people based on their age.

- Older women and men enjoyed a certain level of support and respected in the past. This was true in many cultures of Ethiopia in the past. Things have been changing in recent times. Older people are facing various problems as a result of modernization, globalization, and urbanization.
- Older people are exposed to social exclusion because of their lower social and economic status. In most cases, older people are excluded from social, cultural, political and economic interactions in their communities.
- Older persons are marginalized because they are considered as social burden rather than social assets. Communities do not provide older persons with opportunities to contribute to their communities.

4.5. Religious and ethnic minorities

- Religious and ethnic minorities groups also face different forms of marginalization. There are several examples of marginalization and discrimination targeting religious and ethnic minorities in the world.
- **Let us mention two examples:**
- The Jewish people suffered from discrimination and persecution in different parts of the world. They were targets of extermination in Germany and other Western European countries because of their identity.

- Muslim Rohingyas are among the most marginalized and persecuted (mistreated, victimized) people in the world.
- According to Abdu Hasnat Milton et al (2017), the Rohingya are 'one of the most ill-treated and persecuted refugee groups in the world'. In recent years, more than half-a-million Rohingyas fled from their homes in Myanmar to neighboring countries such as Bangladesh. As people living in refugee camps, the Rohingyas are vulnerable to problems such as malnutrition and physical and sexual abuse.
- These are among the widely known examples of discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities. The problem is not limited to specific areas, regions or countries. Although the level of the problem varies in different contexts, religious and ethnic minorities face different forms of discrimination in many parts of the world.

4.6. Human right approaches and inclusiveness: Anthropological perspectives

- All forms of marginalization and discrimination against vulnerable and minority groups contradict the principles of human rights.
- The major human rights conventions denounce discrimination against women, children, people with disability, older people and other minority and vulnerable groups.
- People with disabilities have the right to inclusive services and equal opportunities. The human rights of women and girls include right to be free from harmful traditional practices such as forced marriage, early marriage, and female genital cutting.
- Any form of discrimination, exclusion, and gender-based violence also violate the human rights of girls and women.

- **Explore the human rights treaties**
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a human rights treaty approved by the United Nations in 1989. The Convention has 41 articles focusing on the survival rights, development rights, protection rights and participation rights of children.
- Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is also a human rights treaty endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979.
- Read the two conventions and outlines articles focusing on exclusion and discrimination against children and women.

- Anthropology appreciates cultural diversity and commonality. Do you remember the meaning of cultural relativism? It is one of the guiding principles in social anthropology.
- It is about the importance of understanding the values, norms, customs and practices of a particular culture in its own context. This requires appreciating the life styles of others including their dressing styles, food habits, beliefs, rituals and celebrations. It also requires avoiding value judgments such as saying 'this custom is backward or primitive'.
- This does not mean that we need to appreciate every custom and practice. Anthropologists do not support/appreciate cultural practices that violate the rights and wellbeing of individuals and groups.

- **For example, anthropologists do not support the following harmful practices in the name of cultural relativism:**
- **Female genital cutting (FGC):** Anthropologists do not support FGC for practical reasons: FGC violates the rights of girls to physical integrity. It has short- and long-term consequences for the health of girls and women.
- **Early/child marriage:** Anthropologists do not support early marriage for similar reasons: Early marriage violates the rights of young girls to make decision about their future. It destroys their chance to education, and personal and professional development. Early marriage negatively affects their physical and psychological wellbeing.