UNIT FOUR
MARGINALIZED, MINORITIES, AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

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, 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.

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 varies 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).

Female Genital Mutilation/cutting

- Female genital mutilation (FGM) includes all procedures that involve the *partial or total removal of external genitalia or other injury* to the female genital organs (such as stitching of the labia majora or pricking of the clitoris) for non-medical reasons . *In addition* to having no health benefits, FGM interferes with normal body functions and can have a negative effect on several aspects of a girl's or woman's life, including her **physical, mental and sexual** health and her relationship with her husband or partner and other close family members.

WHERE AND AT WHAT AGE IS FGM PERFORMED?

- FGM is a **global concern.** To date, the practice is reported in 30 countries in Africa and in a few countries in Asia and the Middle East. Some forms of FGM are also reported to occur among certain ethnic groups in Central and South America, and Eastern Europe. The rise in international migration has also increased the number of girls and women living in the various diasporas populations, including in Australia, Europe, New Zealand and North America, and who have undergone or may undergo the practice.
- The age at which girls experience FGM varies across countries and cultural groups. In some communities, FGM is performed before girls turn five years old, but in others, girls are cut when they are between the ages of five and 14 years, or prior to marriage.

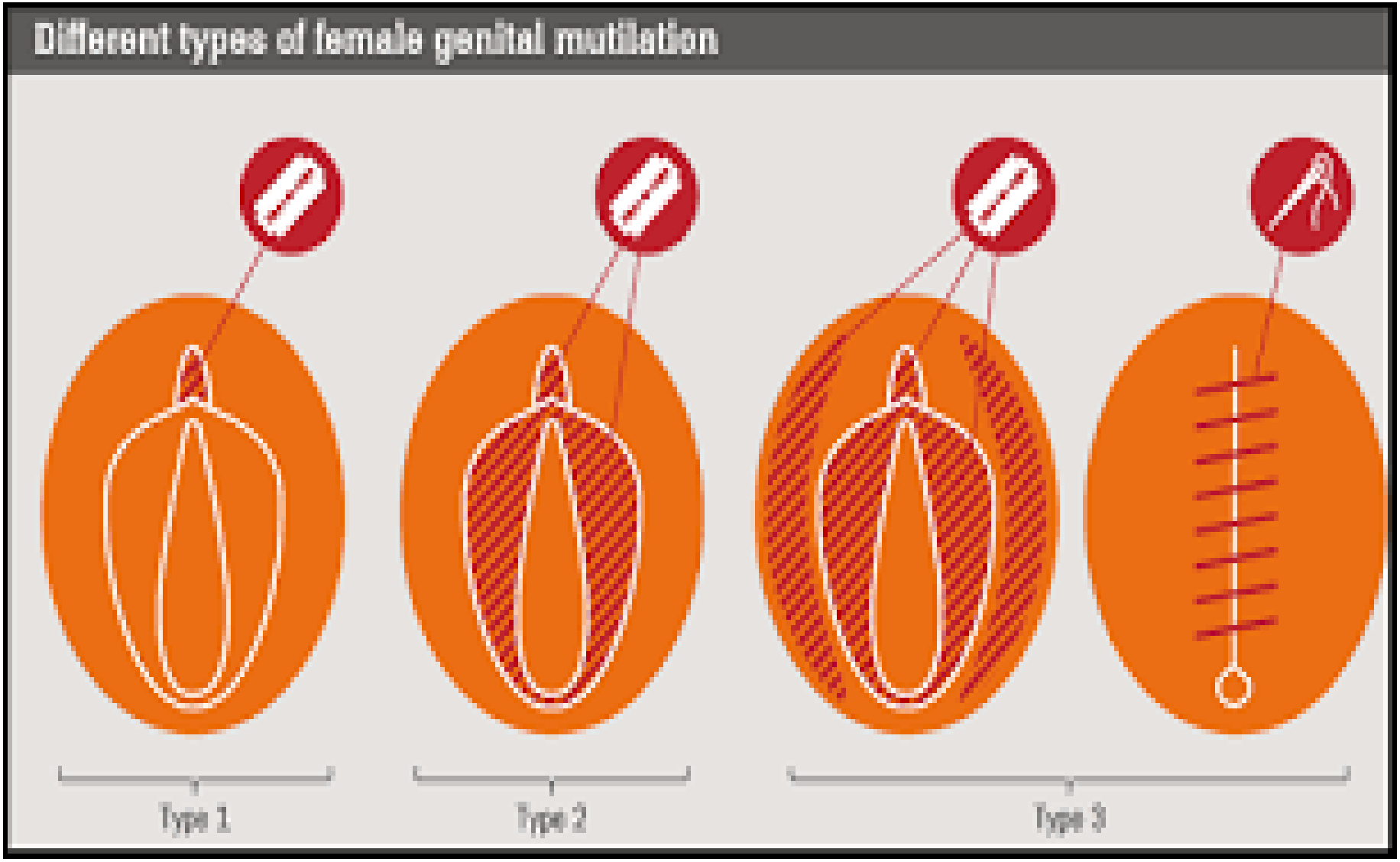
WHY DO COMMUNITIES PRACTISE FGM?

- **RESPECT FOR TRADITION**
- FGM is often seen as part of the history and cultural tradition of the community. Community members, including the women, often support and continue the practice because they see it as a sign of respect towards the elder members of the community.
- **RITE OF PASSAGE**
- In many cultures, FGM constitutes an important rite of passage into adulthood for girls. Often the event is marked with a ceremony and/or celebration. It may be considered a necessary step towards being viewed as a respectable adult woman.
- **SOCIAL CONVENTION**
- Where FGM is widely practiced, it is considered a social convention. Those who adhere to the practice may be better accepted in their communities, while those who do not may face condemnation, harassment and exclusion.
- **ENHANCE FERTILITY**
- In some practicing communities, women and men believe that if a woman is not cut she will not be able to become pregnant or she may face difficulties during labor.

WHY…

- **MARRIAGEABILITY**
- There is often an expectation that men will marry only women who have undergone FGM. The desire and pressure to be married, and the economic and social security that may come with marriage, can perpetuate the practice in some settings.
- **ENSURE VIRGINITY, CHASTITY AND FAITHFULNESS**
- FGM is believed to safeguard a girl's or woman's virginity prior to marriage and ensure fidelity after marriage. Therefore, families may believe that FGM protects a girl's and her family's honor.
- **CLEANLINESS AND BEAUTY**
- In some communities, FGM is performed in order to make girls "clean" and beautiful. Cleanliness may refer to the body; female genitals that are cut or closed are sometimes seen as more hygienic and beautiful, but it may also refer to spiritual purity.
- **FEMININITY**
- The removal of genital parts that are considered masculine (i.e. the clitoris) is considered to make girls more feminine, respectable and beautiful.
- **RELIGION**
- Some communities believe that FGM is a religious requirement, and some religious leaders may promote the practice, even though it is not mentioned in any major religious texts.

CLASSIFICATION OF FGM



- **TYPE I**
- Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans (the external and visible part of the clitoris, which is a sensitive part of the female genitals, which is a sensitive part of the female genitals, with the function of providing sexual pleasure to the woman), and/or the prepuce/clitoral hood (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoral glans).
- Type IA: removal of the prepuce/clitoral hood only.
- Type IB . Removal of the clitoral glans with the prepuce/clitoral hood.
- **TYPE II**
- Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans and the labia minora (the inner folds of the vulva), with or without removal of the labia majora (the outer folds of skin of the vulva).
- Type IIA. Removal of the labia minora only.
- Type IIB. Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans and the labia minora (prepuce/clitoral hood may be affected).
- Type IIC. Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans, the labia minora and the labia majora (prepuce/clitoral hood may be affected).

- **Type III**. (Often referred to as infibulations).
- Narrowing of the vaginal opening with the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the labia minora, or labia majora. The covering of the vaginal opening is done with or without removal of the clitoral prepuce/clitoral hood and glans (Type I FGM).
- **Type IIIA**. Removal and repositioning of the labia minora.
- **Type IIIB**. Removal and repositioning of the labia majora.
- **Type IV.** All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, for example pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterization.

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

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. 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. 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

Major types of marginalization in Ethiopia

Spatial marginalization

Craft-workers settle/live on the outskirts of villages, near to forests, on poor land, around steep slopes.

They are segregated at market places (they sell their goods at the outskirts 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

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

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

Occupational minorities are labeled 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.

Age-based vulnerability

- What is age-based vulnerability? Age-based vulnerability is susceptibility 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.

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.

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.**
- inhibits girls' **personal development**; it hinders girls' chance to education and future professional development.
- exposes young girls to **sexual abuse** by their older husbands.
- leads to **early pregnancies**, which increases risks of diseases and complications during delivery, fistula, and death of the mother or child.

Factors encouraging early marriage

- **Social norms**: Social norms contribute a lot for the continuation of early marriage in many parts of the world. Chastity 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 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.
- **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.

Marginalization of older persons

- The phrase ‘older people’ refers to adults with the **age of 60 and above**. The number of older people is increasing globally. According to the estimation of the United Nations (2009), the number of older people will increase to 2 billion by 2050. Eighty percent of the 2 billion older persons would live in low and middle-income countries. This means Africa would have a large number of older adults after 30 years. Ethiopia, the second populous country in Africa, would also have millions of older persons after three decades.
- 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.

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 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 Nyanmar 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.

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 girls and women.