SUFFERINGS FROM EXPECTATIONS: LIVES OF MARRIED CHILDLESS WOMEN IN A SEMI-URBAN MYANMAR COMMUNITY

U MYINT MOH SOE 4938057 SHHS/M

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THESIS ADVISORS: LUECHAI SRINGERNYUANG, Ph.D., VEENA SIRISOOK, Ph.D., SUCHEELA TANCHAINAN., M.A

ABSTRACT

Gender norms for having a baby for married women in most of the communities are affecting the lives of childless women. Expectations from general population towards married childless women are causing problem when they can not fulfill. In every society people expect children as an outcome of a successful marriage. Childlessness is seen as abnormality or weakness in many societies.

Most of the Myanmar people are Theravada Buddhists and their ways of thinking and cultural beliefs as well as practices have close relation to religious beliefs. Children are seen as invaluable gifts in Myanmar society. They become assets for women living with low income. Many people want to have children to inherit their cultural and religious heritage. Childless women in Myanmar society suffer from gender norms, cultural beliefs, economic problems and social problems through out their life.

This is a qualitative ethnographic was done to find out cultural beliefs and gender norms which affects the life of childless women in contemporary Myanmar society. This investigation was done in a suburban Buddhist community in Yangon, Myanmar.

The study was conducted by using in depth interviews, informal group discussion and text analysis of available literature. 9 childless women were interviewed and clues are looked for form their husband and family members. Informal discussion with elderly persons was done to find out community view on childlessness. Their health seeking behaviors are asked from two midwives.

This study reveals that almost all were still reluctant to talk about their childlessness with other people. Most of them consider themselves as fertile and tried to find answers for their childlessness and struggle to form families without a child. Some of them committed to medical procedures to get a child; some are resisting the pressure from the family to have a child. They blamed disease, their spouse, their fate for childlessness. They also blame themselves for doing mistakes and failure to their predicted gender norms. Although some women seek out help from medical services, they did not know modern fertility technologies like IVF and can not access to these.

In summary, all of them were suffering from expectations from their society and families.

KEY WORDS : CHILDLESSNESS/SUFFERINGS/SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS/ MYANMAR

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