Female-headed households’ vulnerability to poverty and their frequency has increased over time in Ethiopia. Female-headed households have shared the great parts of the poverty stricken segments of the society in the rural parts of the country where majority population and in depth poverty found. This study examines vulnerability to poverty and livelihood strategies of female-headed households in rural Libo Kemkem Woreda, South Gondar Administrative Zone of Amhara National Regional State, Ethiopia. Secondary and primary data were used for the analysis of the social processes. The empirical research employed using both qualitative and quantitative data in addressing the basic research questions through participant observation, individual interviews, life history, focus group discussion and household survey. Besides descriptive statistics, this study used probit model and independent T-test analysis.

Qualitative as well as quantitative findings show that female-headed households suffer from access to and control over basic productive agricultural resources such as farmland, labor, livestock (oxen), capital and other extension services compared to male-headed households. Though the land owning pattern between the male-headed households (0.907 ha.) and female-headed households (0.888 ha.) does not show much variation, the other inputs like male adult children, oxen, cultural taboo are critical in drifting the female-headed households to poverty stricken vulnerability. The probit model result shows that the dummy variables of head of household sex and sources of credit have effect of vulnerability and significant at a significant level of 0.01 and 0.05 respectively. As far as the continuous variables that proposed to affect vulnerability are concerned, age household head (0.1), size of owned land (0.01), and livestock holding in TLU (0.01) have effect on vulnerability. From the results of Independent T-test, there is difference between the two groups, vulnerable and non vulnerable, in the variables of adult equivalent, size of owned land and livestock holding in TLU. They are statistically significant at a significant level of 1%.

Female-headed households have employed various coping and adaptive strategies to cope up with deteriorating economics. The scarcity of resources in the households, the existing networks of social biases and harmful traditional practices in the study area mainly influence their way of life. Coping strategies include ex-ante actions such as diversification of sources of income to ex-post actions adopted at times of distress such as decreasing number and quantity of meals. Governmental and non-governmental organizations tried to back efforts of the community as well as women through engaging in adaptive mechanisms like natural resource conservation, land certification, infrastructural building, and resettlement. They also tried to enhance their decision-making power among the community. However, due to lack of male income earner, child rising, limited job opportunities and feeble social supports, female-headed households could not be effective enough. Moreover, absence of women specific program by governmental and non-governmental organizations aggravated problems of female-headed households.

Findings indicate that the ubiquity of female-headed households in the study area is due to the complex interplay of multiple factors. Economic, social, cultural, health and political factors, which led to the formation of widowed, divorced, and desertion women, heightened the frequency of female-headed households. Besides low health status of the community as main causes of widowed (52.0%) and followed by
divorce (41.3%) due to impoverishment of the community, gender inequality and traditional barriers at household and community level play main important role for the disintegration of families. However, the subordinate status as well as the existence of negative societal attitude excludes female-headed households to benefit from opportunities equally with male-headed households.

The conclusion of the research is that female-headed households are more vulnerable to poverty than male-headed households. The increase of vulnerability to poverty is emanated not only from lack of basic household assets but also socio-cultural vulnerability exposed female-headed households to more complicated problems. Moreover, the absence of strong social security systems leads to most female-headed households to be dependent on food aid in the near future. Therefore, much attention from the government, non-government organizations, as well as the community should be paid to problems of rural female-headed households.

**Key Terms:** Ethiopia, Libo Kemkem Woreda, Poverty, Livelihoods, FHH, MHH, Probit Model, Independent T-test