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Young Lives

The Interplay Between Community, Household and Child Level Influences on Trajectories to Early Marriage in Ethiopia:

Evidence from Young Lives

Alula Pankhurst, Agazi Tiumelissan and Nardos Chuta

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Summary

Child marriage is a global concern and a priority issue for the African Union; the Ethiopian government has devised a strategy to eliminate the practice by 2025. This paper analyses Young Lives survey and qualitative data from girls aged 19 to understand pathways to early marriage, which we argue can best be explained by a combination of interacting factors at community, household and individual levels.

Our findings confirm that child marriage is primarily a female, rural phenomenon, with regional and local differences related to cultural norms. Early teen marriage is more common in regions in the north and is often related to family poverty. Customs of dowry in the north and bridewealth in the south present constraints, especially for teenagers from poorer families.

Household characteristics are also important; parental education, especially that of the father, reduces the likelihood of child marriage. Parental death and absence was highlighted in the qualitative case material. Household wealth was particularly significant, with less than 10 per cent of early marriages among the top tercile, and family circumstances such as ill-health and drought were compounding factors. Parental imposition of marriage was stronger and girls' agency more limited among the younger teenage girls, whereas older teenagers were more likely to make their own marital choices.

The gender imbalance is stark, with 13 per cent of teenage girls married compared to less than 1 per cent of boys. Girls continuing with schooling were less likely to get married, but most left school first due to family poverty and problems. Paid work at 15 was found to be statistically significant as a predictor of early marriage, while case material suggests that some girls chose marriage over jobs involving hard labour. Once married, return to schooling was constrained by social norms and childcare.

The findings suggest a need to recognise that there are early marriage 'hotspots', and conversely other areas where the practice is declining faster and girls marrying later, which can provide important lessons for interventions. Policies should further promote girls' education, including for already married girls, and focus more on protection for younger teenager girls who are at more risk from imposed marriages.

1. Introduction

Despite recent progress, child marriage remains a challenge and policy concern worldwide, and especially in Africa. The Ethiopian government has prioritised addressing the issue in its 2013 National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices, and at the London Girl Summit in 2014 it entered a commitment to end the practice by 2025.

Young Lives has been following 3,000 children in Ethiopia and has evidence about the marriage trajectories of almost 1,000 Older Cohort children who were about 19 years old at the time of the fourth round survey in 2013. This paper considers the factors leading to child and teen or early marriage and argues that a combination of community, household and individual factors explain pathways to child and teen marriage.

Social norms relating to teen marriage and varying types of marriage payment customs play an important part in promoting child marriage. The findings concur with nationally representative samples and other studies that child marriage is largely a female and rural phenomenon; however, considerable community differences even within regions suggest the presence of 'hotspots' and areas of more effective intervention from which lessons can be learned.

At the household level poverty and shocks, notably parental death or illnesses, are important drivers, often leading to girls dropping out of school. Not having prospects of continuing education or gainful employment, about 10 per cent of the girls were persuaded or preferred marrying in their teens. However, rather than girls dropping out of school in order to marry, as is often assumed to be the case, the study found that girls tended to drop out first, start working and then get married. The findings suggest that girls who were able to continue with their education, who were often from better-off households and with more educated parents, were far less likely to marry; those who got married were much less likely to continue with their schooling, suggesting the need for further promotion of girls' education.

In intergenerational relations over marital decision-making the evidence suggests that girls in their early teens (14-15 years old) have less say in choosing their partners, often meeting them only on their wedding day. The qualitative case material suggests that older teenage girls are more able to exercise their agency in marital decisions, sometimes in opposition to parental wishes, and may circumvent social norms requiring marriage payments. However, the agency of girls from poorer households is more constrained by the need to work to support their families, especially in cases of drought, illness and death. In the absence of more promising alternatives through education or rewarding work, some older teenage girls made decisions to get married sometimes in defiance of parental wishes. This suggests that policies and programmes seeking to prevent child marriage should make clearer distinctions between early, middle and late teen marriage and pay greater attention to girls' agency and social norms. There is a need to enhance social protection and promote flexible education opportunities for girls from poor families, and options for married girls and young mothers to return to school after marriage

This paper comprises four main sections after this introduction, which considers child marriage as a global issue and provides an overview of child marriage in Ethiopia and debates about the causes of child marriage. This is followed by a discussion of the importance of location, in terms of rural/urban differences, regional and community variations and the role of social norms. The second section focuses on household and family

characteristics, in particular the issues of parental education, household wealth, parental death, and the risks from shocks. In the third section we present individual characteristics influencing marital status, starting with gender and the exceptional cases of boys marrying early, followed by the linkages with education, aspirations and constraints on continuing schooling. The fourth section considers intergenerational issues, in particular regarding choice of marriage partner, parental decision-making and girls' agency. The major findings are summarised in the conclusions, followed by policy considerations.

1.1 Child marriage as a global issue

Child and teen marriage has received increasing attention and has become a major policy concern worldwide. In 2011 nearly seventy million women aged 20 to 24 were estimated to have married before the age of 18 (Vogelstein 2013). There is a clear gender dimension to this since child and early marriage of men is much less common and there is a strong trend of older men marrying younger women; in some societies, especially in Africa, successful older men customarily married teenage girls as second or even third wives (Phillips and Morris 1971). The age difference 'can affect the power, status and autonomy of women within the household … because women are less mentally, emotionally and physically mature, and/or capable of asserting themselves' (Jensen and Thornton 2003: 14). In Ethiopia the DHS survey of 2011 found that female child marriage is prevalent throughout the country, with the median age at first marriage for women being 17.1, almost a year below the legal age of marriage, whereas the median age for men, at 23.1, was six years older (CSAE 2012).

Based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989), child marriage describes the legal or customary union between two people, of whom one or both spouses are below the age of 18. In this paper we will refer to teen or early marriage since we are also considering youth married at ages 18 and 19, but the analysis will distinguish between those married below and above the legal age, and will also consider differences between early teen (13-14 years old), mid-teen (15-17 years old) and late teen (18-19 years old) marriage. Child marriage is reported to be most prevalent in the world's poorest countries (Jain and Kurz 2007), where social and economic options for females are most limited (Mathur et al. 2003). In a review of data from 40 demographic and health surveys conducted in developing countries, Singh and Samara (1996) showed that the three factors which contribute most significantly to increasing women's age at first marriage are labour-force participation, acquisition of formal education, and degree of urbanisation.

There has been slow progress in the global decline in child marriage, with a decrease over the past four decades from 41.2 per cent to 32.7 per cent (Harris et al. 2014). Despite near universal commitments to end child marriage, according to UNFPA (2012) one in three girls in the developing world will probably be married before they reach the age of 18, while one out of nine girls will be married before their fifteenth birthday. This would translate to 14.2 million girls getting married globally on an annual basis and as many as 39,000 girls married each day.

Child marriage is a serious concern in Africa, with some of the highest rates worldwide found in African countries such as Niger (75 per cent) and Chad (72 per cent), and a sub-Saharan average of 37 per cent (UNFPA, 2012). The African Union has considered this a priority area and in 2015 began a programme focusing on ten countries to bring about an end to child marriage. The issue of child marriage was highlighted at the Girl Summit in London in July

2014 and a year later Ethiopia held its own national summit following the development of a strategy to end child marriage by 2025 (MoWCYA 2013).

1.2 Child marriage in Ethiopia

Studies on prevalence of child marriage in Ethiopia suggest several recurring themes. One is that girls engaged in child marriage are more likely to be from rural areas and in terms of region from Amhara, Tigray, and Benishangul-Gumuz, and with limited formal education (Assefa et al. 2005, Lindstrom et al. 2009, CSAE 2012, Erulkar 2013, Jones et al. 2014, Presler-Marshall 2015, Jones et al. 2015). In a 2010 study, Erulkar et al. found that 62.6 per cent of rural girls under the age of 18 were married, as opposed to 25.8 per cent of girls in urban areas; 72 per cent of girls with no education had been married, in contrast with 22 per cent of girls with nine or more years of education. However, there is a dearth of information on the under-15 age group. Few studies have differentiated between child marriage trends during early, middle, and late adolescence. The period of adolescence spans nearly a decade and is a time of vast physiological, psychological, and social changes. In a study of women aged 20-24 in seven regions of Ethiopia, Erulkar (2013) found 17 per cent were married before the age of 15, 30 per cent between the ages of 15-17, and 26 per cent between the ages of 18-19.

The ethnographic literature is not very explicit on age of marriage, in part because age is often not considered a diacritical factor, although there are references to girls marrying earlier than boys. Nonetheless, it is clear that early marriage of girls used to be common in the pre-revolutionary period prior to 1974, especially in northern Ethiopia, notably among the Amhara and to some extent the Tigraway. There were also customary institutions for child betrothal, with a girl being brought up by her in-laws and a boy working for his in-laws and marrying their daughter, and some cases of households arranging marriage alliances while children were infants, or at birth, or even beforehand (Ambatchew 1956; Shack 1974; Bauer 1977). These forms of early engagement were very much special cases with their own particular logics related to wealth and kinship, the child betrothals of boys being a strategy for poor young men to offer labour services, and that of girls a strategy to seal alliances between wealthy households.

In Tigray, dowry payments (called *gezmi*) traditionally could involve 10 to 15 head of cattle and a horse or mule, although they could also include land and weapons (Shack 1974; Bauer 1977). In Amhara, endowments were in theory presented by both sides, usually consisting of moveable property such as livestock, which each party retained on divorce (Wodajo 1953; Ambatchew 1956; Hoben 1973). These endowments and arranged marriages involved wealthy and politically powerful families who sought desirable alliances, whereas poorer families might delay the process until their children were already mature, while the very poor may never make any contracts or have their children go through the ritual of marriage (Reminick 1973; Amera 2004). However, in practice and more recently, payments have tended to be limited, taking the form of gifts given by the groom to the bride, notably clothing and jewellery, and sometimes gifts to the bride's parents, although there may also be gifts to the groom from the bride's parents. Moreover, endowments were limited by class and wealth, by the land redistribution after the 1974 revolution and subsequent impoverishment, by droughts, and by reduced land holdings with an increasing population.

In contrast to the northern systems of dowry, in most of the south, including among the Oromo and a number of societies in the Southern Region, bridewealth systems are common. These traditionally involved gifts of cattle, iron bars and, after the monetisation of the

economy, cash (Huntingford 1955; Ambatchew et al. 1957; Cerulli 1956; Hamer 1987; Baxter 1996). Among the Oromo and some southern peoples, polygyny is a cultural norm, but generally restricted to a few successful elderly men. Marriage by abduction or elopement was often considered a legitimate form of marriage, particularly for poorer men unable to pay the full bridewealth, but requiring lesser compensatory reconciliatory payments (Cerulli 1956; Ambatchew et al. 1957; Holcomb 1973; Wadillo 1985). There is scant ethnographic evidence on the age of marriage in southern Ethiopia. Among the Oromo one report suggests that girls were expected to be married off by the age of 16, whereas young men seldom married before the age of 20 (Ambatchew et al. 1957). Most of the ethnographic literature is more concerned about types of marriage partners that are forbidden (often close kin, in some cases over several generations) or preferred (such as the cross-cousin marriage among the Afar) (Huntingford 1955).

There seems to be a strong correlation between systems of bridewealth and abduction as a culturally recognised form of marriage. The 2005 EDHS data show that the proportion of women married by abduction is much higher in the Southern Region (12.9 per cent) and Oromia (10.8 per cent) than the national average (7.8 per cent), with a rate of only 2.4 per cent in Amhara and 1.4 per cent in Tigray, and a much lower rate in urban areas (4.7 per cent) compared to rural areas (8.5 per cent) (CSAE 2006).

1.2.1 Causes of child marriage

Various socio-economic factors are said to influence child marriage. In some Ethiopian societies, parents marry their adolescent girls as a way of forming bonds with other families (Emirie 2005) and as a means of gaining respect from the society elders (Jones et al. 2014). Child marriage was and still remains a way of fulfilling a social role in the society (Assefa et al. 2005), and a means of ensuring social inclusion for the female adolescent (Boyden et al. 2013). Traditionally, parents hold the belief that the earlier the girl is married off, the greater the chances are of her maintaining virginity (Assefa 2005; Emirie 2005; Jones et al. 2014).

The EDHS 2011 suggests that the median age of first marriage increases with education levels: in the case of women in the age category 25-49 who have been educated to secondary level, it exceeds the legal age to reach the age of 22.8. Wealth also matters, as the median age for women in the lowest quintile is 16.4, while in the fourth quintile it is 16.9, and in the fifth quintile it is above the legal age, at 19.1. Differences according to education and wealth for men are much less significant (CSAE 2012a: 66, Table 4.4).

Today, economic factors seem to be a major driving force behind many child marriages. Poverty is commonly mentioned as a rationale for the practice of child marriage. Emirie (2005) noted that in the Mecha Woreda of West Gojjam, adult males can only become heads of households and request land from the Peasant Association (PA) if they are married. Conversely, the bride's family may receive various material benefits including money, cattle or land as dowry (Assefa 2005; Emirie 2005; Jones et al. 2014; UNESCO-IICBA 2014). With the decline in land size and an increasing population in rural regions, girls from wealthier families have become highly sought-after brides (Jones et al. 2014). Furthermore, with girls being seen as a financial burden to the family, marriages are considered an assurance of a financially secure future for the bride (Emirie 2005).

Causes of child marriage differ from one region to another and from one household to another. However, there have been limited studies regarding the causes of child marriage among different ethnic groups. Erulkar's (2010) study of attitudes towards marriage showed

the ideal age for marriage among rural girls to be under the age of 15 for 7.7 per cent, and between the ages of 15 and 17 for 44.1 per cent of adolescent respondents. Since over 50 per cent of the respondents in the study were in agreement with child marriage, the power of economic, cultural and other influences cannot be taken lightly.

One of the most important features of customary female child marriage is that it is arranged by the parents of the couple, who can determine whom a girl marries, when, and with what benefits to the two families involved. Evolutionist interpretations might suggest that in vulnerable Ethiopian communities dependent on rain-fed agriculture, exposed to frequent natural disasters and with little or no social protection, arranged child marriages may have historically offered both demographic and material advantages. The material status of a family or household would be considered closely linked to the fertility of its female members, in that a large number of children would increase the labour power of the domestic unit. In the context of high rates of maternal and infant mortality and morbidity, marrying off girls at puberty could ensure continuity of labour and increase a woman's fertility overall by extending her reproductive life (Mathur et al. 2003). At the same time, marrying a daughter off would often help to relieve the burden on highly constrained families (Jain and Kurz 2007: 9). Early marriage of girls is also associated, especially in Africa, with bridewealth (Mathur et al. 2003: 6), in which the husband's family invests in the wife's capacity to bear children and to fulfil her expected sexual and productive duties, obligations best complied with earlier in life (Bawah et al. 1999).

The Ethiopian literature raises some doubts about the simplistic assumption that early marriage is related to poverty and bridewealth systems commonly found in Africa. First, child marriages were often arranged by rich and – in the past – politically powerful families wanting to secure good partners for their offspring (Reminick 1973); although exceptionally, a poor young man might work for a rich man and eventually married his daughter. Second, child marriage is more salient in northern Ethiopia, where systems of dowry exist, although, unlike the Eurasian dowry systems discussed by Goody (1973, 1976), this does not seem to delay women's marriage while parents search for a suitable match, but rather leads to competition for arranging marriages early. However, this logic applies only to wealthy elites, and with increasing impoverishment parental endowments are becoming less common. Third, child marriage is less significant in the south, where bridewealth is common, and the association of bridewealth with child marriage does not seem to hold, possibly because the accumulation of bridewealth takes time on the part of young men and their families, thereby actually delaying marriage, and also since polygynous marriage of elderly men to young girls is actually fairly rare, as few men can afford it.

The evidence from the Young Lives sites presents a mixed picture (Boyden et al. 2013). A *kebele* (administrative unit) official in the Amhara site explained that child marriage extends a woman's reproductive years and enables her to have many children. In both Amhara and Tigray, improving the economic status of the new household was said to be an explicit objective in arranging the marriage of girls and crucially influences the choice of partner and age of marriage. Thus, in the Tigray site, a care giver confirmed that families look for a daughter-in-law from a wealthy household. The traditions of dowry sometimes involved a ratio of two to one, with the bride's parents offering twice the amount offered by the groom's parents. Recently, dowry payments have become much less important. In the Amhara site, poor and elderly parents were said to be keen to seek the support of a son-in-law. However, a local kebele official offered a different view, arguing that in the past the rich would marry their children off at a younger age than the poor both because "it was considered one of the

indicators of being rich" and because it was possible to own large plots of land, and people with significant amounts of land tended to want to establish marriage ties with wealthier families. It used to be customary for the bride's and groom's parents to endow the newly-weds with land and cattle, the gifts provided by each side being of equal value. Nowadays, however, with the shortage of land and cattle, couples receive very small parcels of land from each set of parents, and money instead of cattle, ranging from 500 to 1,000 birr (£18–£37). In Oromia, community elders stated that the single most significant gain for the bride's family is the bridewealth (*gebera*). This can amount to a substantial sum of money – up to 8,000 birr (about £300) – as well as several cattle. Indeed, adults in this site reflected on whether arranged child marriages could be considered as merely exchanging girls for money. However, accumulating the bridewealth is a constraint: some youngsters prefer to avoid arranged marriages and elope through 'voluntary abduction'; and very few men have been able to marry second wives.

A major rationale for female child marriage expressed by respondents is the risk of girls having sex before they marry. Marriage before or at puberty was said to safeguard their fidelity by ensuring that they are already spoken for when they reach sexual maturity. Concerns about sex outside marriage were often mentioned and are very diverse, ranging from detriment to reproductive health to reputational damage, unwanted pregnancy, social stigmatisation and exclusion from the family or clan. Thus, caregivers in Oromia saw child marriage as a means of preventing promiscuity and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS. They also emphasised how girls who have sex outside marriage may be abandoned by their partners, rendering them unmarriageable, and how girls who become pregnant before marriage risk being ostracised from the family and clan, together with their babies.

2. The Young Lives data

Young Lives has been following 1,000 Older Cohort children over four rounds of surveys. At the time of the Round 4 survey in 2013, a total of 909 Older Cohort children were interviewed at the age of about 19. Young Lives has fairly accurate information about the children's ages since these were first recorded during the first round in 2002 when the children were aged around one year (six months to 18 months), and the month and day of birth were recorded. By the age of 19 a total of 58 adolescents had been married or cohabited, of whom only three were men. The median age at which the Young Lives women got married was 16.8 years, ranging from 13.2 years to 19.3 years.

This paper considers data from the four rounds of survey in relation to location, marriage, household characteristics, in particular wealth, parental education and aspiration for their children, and parental death, as well as individual child characteristics relating to education, work, and partner choice. In the following discussion is it important to note that the Young Lives sample is not nationally representative. Moreover, the sample is fairly small and the limited numbers married do not allow us to draw firm conclusions. However, the data do concur with trends in nationally representative data and findings of other studies.

The paper also makes use of the three rounds of qualitative data for five married girls, which provide evidence about the processes leading to early marriage and the intergenerational dynamics in decision-making. We also consider the characteristics of nine additional cases

from the survey, six girls and three boys, in relation to marriage payments, objective and subjective wealth dynamics, and educational and work aspirations and achievements.

Location: urban/rural, region and community differences

In the Young Lives sample, as in the nationally representative data, early marriage is very much a female and rural phenomenon. In the Young Lives sites, early marriage was found more commonly in communities in the Oromia and Amhara regions. By the age of 19, a total of 55 young women (13 per cent) had married or cohabited (including four who were already divorced or separated), compared to only three young men (0.6 per cent), two of whom were married and one cohabiting (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Marital status by sex, urban/rural location and region of Young Lives youth.*

Marital status			Single	Married	Cohabitant	Divorced	Separated	Total
Sex	Male	Count	483	2	1	0	0	486
		%	99.4	0.4	0.2	0	0	100.0
	Female	Count	367	45	6	2	2	422
		%	87.0	10.7	1.4	0.5	0.5	100.0
Site type	Rural	Count	492	41	6	3	1	543
		%	90.6	7.6	1.1	0.6	0.2	100.0
	Urban	Count	358	6	1	0	0	365
		%	98.1	1.6	0.3	0	0	100.0
Region	Addis Ababa	Count	128	2	0	0	0	130
		%	98.5	1.5	0	0	0	100.0
	Amhara	Count	168	13	2	2	1	186
		%	90.3	7.0	1.1	1.1	0.5	100.0
	Oromia	Count	164	18	3	0	0	185
		%	88.6	9.7	1.6	0	0	100.0
	SNNP	Count	208	6	2	0	0	216
		%	96.3	2.8	0.9	0	0	100.0
	Tigray	Count	182	8	0	1	0	191
				4.2	0	0.5	0	100.0
Total		Count	850	47	7	3	1	908
		%	93.6	5.2	0.8	0.3	0.1	100.0

The location where the children live clearly matters. Only seven of the teen marriages (12 per cent) were in urban areas and only 2 per cent of the urban sample were married, compared to 9 per cent of the rural sample. The median age for the urban sites was 17.9, as compared to 16.7 for rural areas. Likewise urban/rural differences are found in the nationally representative data; the DHS median age of marriage for women aged 15-45 in urban areas is 19.3, as compared to 16.6 in rural areas (CSA 2012).

However, it is important to note that most of the urban marriages in the Young Lives sample were in small rural towns: three in a small town in Oromia (with about 6,400 people)[1] and one each in two small towns, one in Amhara (with about 17,400 people) and the other in SNNP

1 The population figures for the towns are according to the 2007 census.

(with about 24,200 people). There were two marriages in one of the three sites in Addis Ababa. However, there were none in the other two sites in Addis Ababa, the large city in SNNP (157,000 people), or a small town in Tigray (6,900 people).

In regional terms the numbers and proportions married are considerably higher in sites in two regions: Oromia and Amhara (see Figure 1). The slightly higher prevalence in Oromia may be surprising given the evidence that the prevalence of teen marriage is highest in Amhara (CSAE 2012), and it should be emphasised again that the Young Lives data is not nationally representative.

Figure 1. *Percentage of 19-year-olds married by region.*

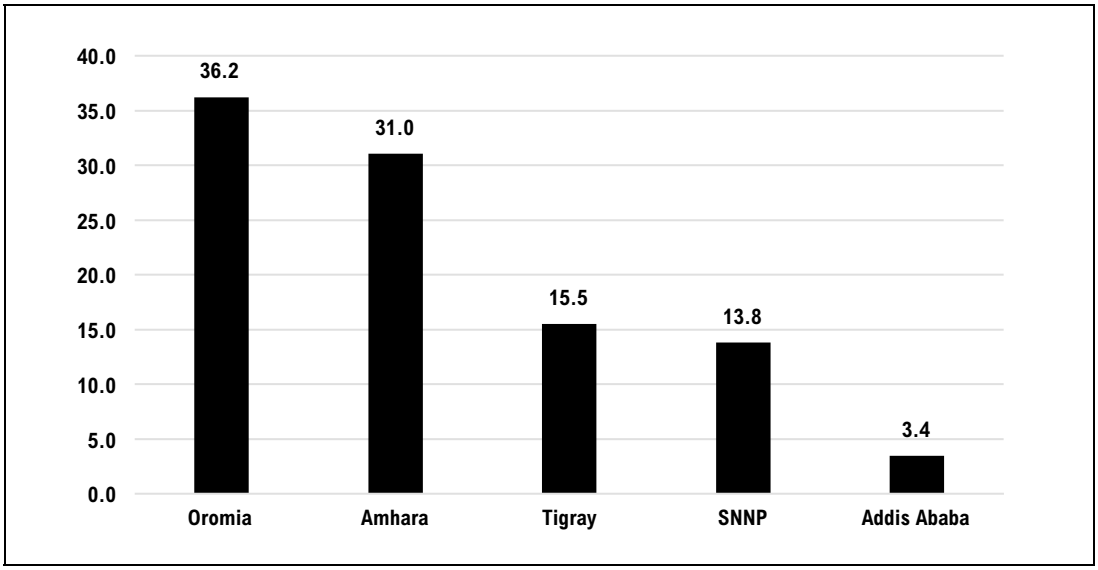
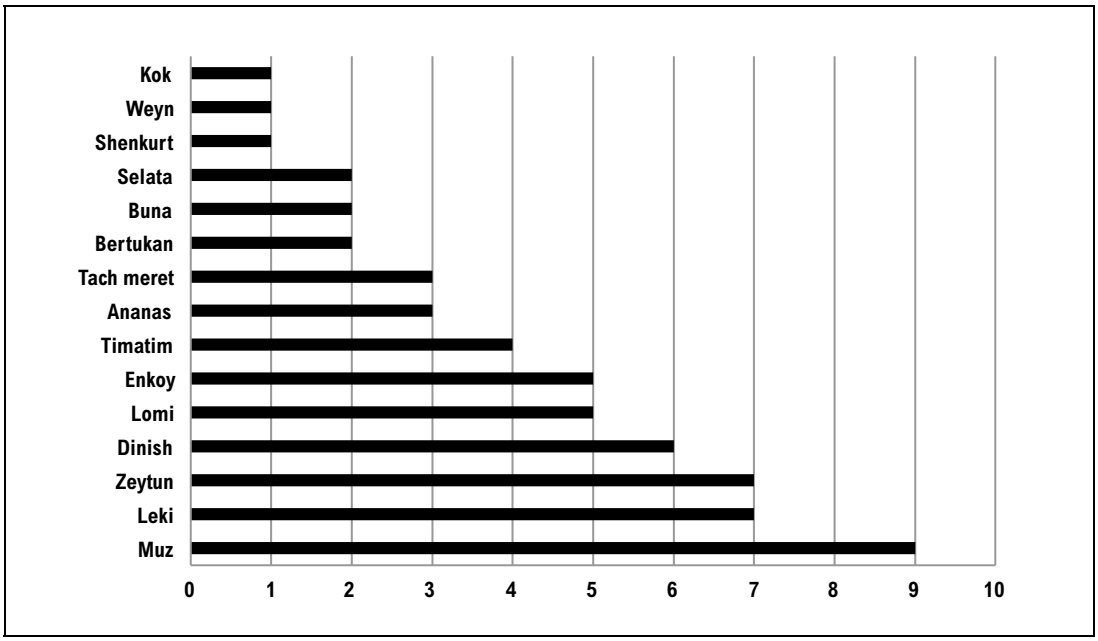


Figure 2. *Number of marriages by site.*



The Young Lives children were interviewed at about age 19, with a six months variation. In relation to the legal age of adulthood at 18 we can consider differences in terms of region between those married before and after.

Considering only those married under the legal age of 18, there were 41 girls or 79 per cent of the total. The proportion of urban girls married under the legal age (4.8 per cent) was less than a third of the rural proportion (14.8 per cent). There was also a marked difference in regional terms with proportions in sites in Amhara highest (17.9 per cent) followed closely by those in Oromia (16.5 per cent) while much lower proportion in Tigray (6.5 per cent) and SNNP (5.4 per cent), and only one of the two cases of early marriage in Addis Ababa was underage.

A breakdown into three categories of early teen (13-14 years), middle teen (15-17,) and late teen (18-19), is revealing. Six out of the seven girls married under the age of 15 were in sites in Amhara, and one in Tigray, suggesting that early adolescence is very much a phenomenon in northern Ethiopia. Among the 30 girls married between the ages of 15 and 17, the largest number were in Oromia (12), followed by Amhara (8), with much fewer in Tigray (5) and SNNP (4), and only one in Addis Ababa. When we consider those married above the legal age of 18, there is only one in Amhara out of 15, compared to a third in the remaining regions of Oromia (6 out of 18), Tigray (3 out of 9) and SNNP (2 out of 6).

Despite clear regional differences, there are also quite striking differences by site (see Figure 2).[2] The highest number (9 marriages) was in a site in Amhara and the next highest number (7) was in two sites, one in Oromia and the other in Tigray. However, there are other sites within each of the regions with only one, two or three marriages. Moreover, in addition to the urban sites already mentioned, there were two rural sites, one in Amhara and the other in Tigray, where there were no early marriages reported within the sample. This fits with the suggestion noted in the Overseas Development Institute mapping report on early marriage (Presler-Marshall 2015; Jones et al. 2015) that there are 'hotspots' or local differences in the prevalence of early marriage. Context is also important in terms of community change, where wage labour opportunities for teenagers in rural sites, such as in irrigation or in stone crushers, bring boys and girls together and provide them with some income that can be a stimulus for them to consider getting married.

3.1 Customary marriage age and payments

When we consider customary traditions of child marriage, we need to distinguish between the early, mid and late teens. Customary early teen marriage is known to be common in Amhara and to some extent also in Tigray, so it is perhaps not surprising that all four girls married at 13 were in these regions.

Two of the girls married at 13 were from the same site in Amhara. Tenagne was married at the age of 13 years and two months, whereas Zelalem was married at 13 and 11 months. Neither was in school in the Round 1 survey, although Zelalem was apparently in grade 4 at the time of the Round 3 survey. They both had high aspirations at age 12: Tenagne to complete a degree and become a teacher and Zelalem to complete grade 12 and become a doctor. However, neither expected to get that kind of job and Zelalem said economic constraints were the problem and that she expected to be a domestic worker in the future. Both apparently had marriages arranged by their parents in which they had no say and they first met their husbands on their wedding day.

In Amhara society there are marriage gifts expected from both the bride and the groom's side; ideally with matching contributions, though often more from the groom's side. Tenagne

2 The site names used are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the communities.

received land from her parents (10,000 m^2) and they paid 2,500 birr for the wedding, whereas her husband's family also gave land (25,000m^2) and paid 7,000 birr. Zelalem received land from a relative (5,000 m^2) and brought utensils worth 500 birr to her marriage; her husband also received the same amount of land (5,000 m^2) from a relative and brought grain worth 1,790 birr.

3. Household and family characteristics

In this section we consider household and family characteristics, focusing on the relevance of the levels of education of both mothers and fathers, their educational aspirations for their children and the household's wealth, in terms of wealth terciles in the three rounds of surveys preceding the marriage.

Table 2. *Household and family characteristics.*

Family characteristics	Never married (%)	Married (%)*			N
		Total	Before age 18	18 plus	
Mother's education*					
No education	86.8	13.2	10.7	2.4	205
Lower primary	81.6	18.4	15.8	2.6	114
Upper primary	94.6	5.4	1.8	3.6	56
More than grade 8	97.2	2.8	0.0	2.8	36
Father's education***					
No education	86.0	14.0	12.0	2.0	150
Lower primary	78.5	21.5	17.8	8.7	107
Upper primary	91.9	8.1	4.8	3.2	62
More than grade 8	97.1	2.9	0.0	2.9	68
Wealth Index R1***					
Bottom	80.6	19.4	15.7	3.7	134
Middle	84.8	15.2	13.0	2.2	138
Top	96.6	3.4	1.4	2.1	146
Wealth Index R2**					
Bottom	81.4	18.6	15.2	3.5	145
Middle	86.7	13.3	11.7	1.6	128
Top	94.5	5.5	2.8	2.8	145
Wealth Index R3*					
Bottom	83.8	16.2	12.2	4.1	148
Middle	85.4	14.6	13.0	1.6	123
Top	93.2	6.8	4.8	2.1	146
Caregivers' educational aspiration for child at 12 (Higher education, college and above)	88.9	11.1	8.6	2.5	325
OVERALL	87.6	12.4	9.8	2.6	419

Notes: * The married category includes those who were married but got divorced and those cohabiting without being formally married. Chi-square test of association: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Source: Older Cohort, R1 (2002), R2 (2006), R3 (2009) and R4 (2013)

4.1 Parental education

Parental education was found to be important since parents whose daughters married early tended to have lower educational attainments (Table 2). A third of girls who had never been married had fathers who had gone to school beyond the first cycle of primary (33 per cent) as compared to 13 per cent of those who were married, and a quarter of the single girls had mothers who had beyond primary education (24 per cent), as compared to 8 per cent of those who were married. Whereas the fathers' education was found to be highly significant that of the mother seemed to be less so. This may be related in part to fathers probably having a greater say in marrying their daughters early. In the qualitative data there is evidence of mothers saying they do not want their daughters to marry early but rather that they should continue with their education. However, in the survey caregivers' educational aspirations for their daughters at age 12 was not found to be statistically significant.

4.2 Household wealth

Household wealth was also found to be important. Only 10 per cent of married girls in the Round 4 survey had parents in the top tercile in Round 1 as compared to 38 per cent of girls who were not married. Interestingly the significance decreases steadily from the Round 1 survey through Round 2 to Round 3, suggesting that the household's earlier circumstances are more predictive.

To what extent were the very early marriages related to household wealth dynamics? We can consider both the 'objective' wealth ranking into quintiles and subjective questions asking the respondent to rank themselves both comparatively to other households and in terms of sense of wellbeing according to pre-determined ranking categories.

In one case in Amhara the young woman came from a poor family and felt that her lot improved through marriage. Tenagne's household was ranked as in the second quintile from bottom in Round 1 and in the last quintile in Rounds 2 and 3. Asked in the survey to compare her natal family with her spouse's, Tenagne felt her family was "worse off", so she felt her condition had improved. While she felt her natal family four years ago was "about average", she ranked her marital household as "richer than most". Her natal family was "struggling to get by" but she felt her new household was "comfortable".

In contrast, in another case in a different site in Amhara both households seem to be fairly poor and the girl did not see improvements in subjective terms. Zelalem felt her natal family and her spouses were "the same". Her household was ranked in the third quintile in Round 1, in the lowest quintile in Round 2 and the second quintile from the bottom in Round 3. She considered her natal family as "a little poorer than most" while her spouse's was "among the poorest", and both families "never had quite enough".

The tradition of marriage payment in Tigray ideally involves dowry, with the bride's family providing bigger gifts and endowments to the newly-wed couple. Zafu's case suggests some improvement, with the woman marrying into a richer household. Zafu was 13 years and two months when her parents married her off. She had no decision in the marriage, which was a church marriage, and had known her husband for less than a month. She had started school in grade one in Round 1 but never continued any further. There seems to be evidence that she came from a poor family and married into a richer one. Her household was in the second quintile from the bottom in Round 1 and in the lowest quintile in Rounds 2 and 3. Her household contributed only 2,000 birr and her husband's 7,000 birr, and neither side contributed land or livestock. Most interestingly she ranked her household as "among the

poorest" four years earlier and her current household in Round 4 as "richer than most" Likewise, she viewed her household as "poor" four years previously whereas she considered her current household as "comfortable".

The cases from the survey presented above suggest that marriage can be seen as a means of social mobility for some poorer households in sites in the north of the country.

4.3 Parental death

Another important variable is whether the child's parent is alive (see Table 3).

Table 3: *Parental death by marital status.*

Marital status		Father alive		
		No	Yes	Total
Single (never married)	N	37	659	696
	%	5.3	94.7	100
Married	N	4	42	46
	%	8.7	91.3	100
Total	N	41	701	742
	%	5.5	94.5	100

Marital status		Mother alive		
		No	Yes	Total
Single (never married)	N	19	778	797
	%	2.4	97.6	100
Married	N	2	51	53
	%	3.8	96.2	100
Total	N	21	829	850
	%	2.5	97.5	100

There were higher proportions who had lost parents among the married children as compared to those who were single, and within that, higher proportions having lost a father. Almost 9 per cent of the married children had lost a father and 4 per cent a mother.

Although the differences were not found to be statistically significant, the qualitative data suggest that a father's death is actually quite important, especially if the mother becomes unwell. Four out of the five married case study children had lost their father and the fifth case the father was not supporting the household. In the case of Beletech, she was a double orphan who was living in Leki in Oromia with her aunt in a rural area near a town; she was the only girl in the house and felt she was overworked. She decided to elope at the age of 17 with a man who promised to take her to town, marry her and look after her.

Parental pressure, especially when a mother is seriously ill and wants to see her daughter cared for in case she dies, can be an important reason for early marriage, as Haymanot's case illustrates. Haymanot, who lives in Zeytuni in Tigray, got married at 16 since her mother was ill and wanted to see her daughter married and secure and Haymanot felt she needed to support her mother, who was unable to work. However Haymanot did not want to get married and only agreed to please her mother, as she feared she might die. She recalled:

> "I asked my mother to stop negotiating with the elders. I begged her to work and help her for some time up until she gets well. I also asked her to delay the marriage as I was too young. But she worried that she was getting very sick and she wanted to see my marriage before something bad happened. Then, I said ok."

Though the death of a father can put pressure on the mother to marry off her daughter, even if the father is alive he may not be supporting the family, as the case of Ayu demonstrates. Ayu lived with both her parents in Leki in Oromia. Her father, who was an alcoholic, was in conflict with her mother and did not support the family. Ayu worked both in the house and for wage labour. She felt she was overworked and marriage meant a welcome change and the prospect of starting her own life.

4.4 Family circumstances: poverty, shocks and disputes

Among the reasons for dropping out of school, poverty and shocks were important in all the cases, leading to children working to assist their families. In two of these cases health shocks were important. Ayu had dropped out of school due to an illness on her neck, and Haymanot to earn money to look after her sick mother. The drought and the need to look for work to support her widowed mother meant that Sessen, who also lives in Zeytuni in Tigray, dropped out of school. Beletech was not doing well at school and was involved in work at home as well as wage labour; she dropped out of grade 2 and said she preferred to work but married shortly afterwards. Family circumstances were probably also an incentive in the case of Fatuma. She was living in Addis Ababa in Bertukan with her mother, who herself lived with her sister with whom she did not get on and had disputes with her over accommodation, and her aunt wanted them to leave. Fatuma's mother was eventually given a house for rent from the local kebele administration with her married son and Fatuma went to live with her. Then Fatuma met her husband, a petty trader selling fruit and vegetables, and was in a relationship with him for some time before her mother knew and he proposed. Fatuma had a higher workload while with her mother, whereas after her marriage she only had routine household chores. Her mother said she got married "to escape poverty and family problems".

5. Individual characteristics influencing marital status

The starkest finding regarding teen marriage in the Young Lives Older Cohort is the gender imbalance. Whereas 12 per cent of girls were married, less than 1 per cent of the boys (3 cases) were married.

5.1 Teen marriage of boys

What might be the explanations for exceptional cases of boys marrying early? Are the reasons related to material status?

Two of the three boys are from different sites in the Southern Nations and Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), and one is in Oromia. The boy in one of the sites in SNNPR (Ziyad) was married at 15 and two months, whereas the boy in Oromia (Demissie) was married at 17 years and four months. Both reported that they initiated the marriage themselves. In the SNNPR case he had known his bride for over a month and in the Oromia

case for over a year. Regarding education Ziyad never went beyond first grade, whereas the other two reached grade 4. At age 12, Ziyad aspired to be trader, Demissie to be a civil servant and Dejene, the boy in the second SNNP site, to be a doctor.

Poverty may well be a factor in one of the cases from SNNPR where the household's wealth ranking declined, and upon marriage he went to live with his wife's family. EZiyad came from a household that declined in wealth from quintile 4 in Round 1 to quintile 3 in Round 2, and quintile 2 in Round 3. He also ranked his household as "among the poorest" four years earlier and when interviews in Round 4 as "a little poorer than most". His family contributed 4,600 birr to the wedding and his wife's family 2,000 birr. Perhaps most revealingly, he reported was that he was living with his spouse's family, although in a separate house.

In contrast, the boy from Oromia came from a household whose wealth ranking increased, though his subjective ranking was still low. Demissie came from a family that increased in wealth ranking from quintile 2 in Round 1 to quintile 4 in Rounds 2 and 3. However, he claimed his household was "among the poorest" four years earlier and had improved currently to "a little poorer than most". His family provided land and grain when he got married.

We know far less about Dejene, the second case in SNNPR, who was actually co-habiting rather than in a formal marriage, apart from that his family was ranked in the lowest quintile in Rounds 1 and 3 and in the second from bottom quintile in the Round 2.

5.2 Education and early marriage

Table 4 clearly shows that once above primary school education, the proportion of married girls dwindles and the relationship between highest grade completed and marital status was found to be statistically significant.

Table 4. *Highest grade completed by marital status.*

Highest level/grade completed	Single		Married		Before 18 years		18 and above		total
	No	%	No	%	N	%	N	%	total
None	5	83.3	1	16.7	0	0	1	16.7	6
Lower primary (1-4)	20	58.8	14	41.2	9	26.5	5	14.7	34
Upper primary (5-8)	111	79.9	28	20.2	20	14.4	8	5.8	139
Secondary level (9-10)	141	95.9	6	4.1	5	3.4	1	0.7	147
Pre-university (11-12)	55	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	55
Vocational/diploma	24	92.3	2	7.7	0	0	2	7.7	26
University	11	91.7	1	8.3	0	0	1	8.3	12

Furthermore, in Table 5 we can see that for completion of primary, secondary school and preparatory levels, the proportions who are married decreases with each the three examination levels.

Table 5. *Completion of primary, secondary and preparatory levels by marital status.*

	No certificate	Completed primary 8th grade	Completed secondary 10th grade	Completed preparatory for university 12th grade	Completed technical and vocational
N single	295	259	234	54	7
%	34.7	30.5	27.5	6.4	0.8
N married	37	14	5	1	0
%	70.2	17	10.6	2.1	0
Total	332	273	239	55	8

However, this does not explain whether marriage is a direct cause for stopping going to school, or whether the young people interrupt their education, start work and only then, lacking other opportunities, consider marriage as a realistic or desirable option, or are persuaded, pressurised or forced by marry by their parents or a prospective groom.

Among the five married girls in the qualitative sub-sample, four did not complete primary school (two interrupting in lower primary and two in upper primary) and only one, living in Addis Ababa, completed secondary school.

The two who were in the first cycle of primary school when they left school had not got beyond grade 2. Sessen, living in Tigray, completed grade 1 but never started in grade 2 as she needed to help her widowed mother cope with drought by starting paid work in a stone crusher plant. She had already been working from an early age looking after livestock as she was the last born child and didn't have brothers who could herd.

Ayu, living in Oromia, dropped out of grade 2 due to a recurrent neck illness, and became engaged in paid work. She moved in and out of school after that, never progressing beyond grade 2, and can only read and write her name; according to the fieldworker she seems to have little interest in education.

Of the two who interrupted schooling in the second cycle of primary, one dropped out of grade 5 when her mother was ill and she needed to work to support her. Haimanot, living in Tigray, had been doing well as school but, as noted earlier, there was no one to look after her chronically ill mother so she started working in a stone crusher plant.

The second, Beletech, living in Oromia, is the only girl who stopped school and got married a few months later. Beletech is an orphan living with her aunt. In addition to domestic work she had been involved in wage labour and working in her 'brother's' shop. Work meant that she did not have time to study and do homework and was sometimes late; she had poor grades and did not seem interested in school. When the fieldworker said to her: "There wasn't anyone who asked you why you wanted to quit?", she answered "No one asked me about that. I simply quitted the school and decided to marry". The fieldworker continued, asking: "You got married as soon as you quit your education?", she answered "Yes, I didn't take time to marry". Beletech's husband had previously proposed by sending elders to her aunt, but her aunt had refused saying she had to continue her education.

Only one girl, living in the Addis Ababa site, had completed grade 10 but she did not score high enough grades to go on to preparatory classes for university. Fatuma then joined a Technical and Vocational Education college but dropped out after two months as she did not find it interesting. However, she did a computer training course and learned tailoring, sewing and embroidery at the local mosque, though apparently she did not use the skills to find work.

Consideration of the cases suggests that, apart from the possible exception of Beletech, the girls did not leave school in order to get married but rather that they had left school mainly due to poverty, shocks and family problems, became engaged in work to support their families and only subsequently got married.

5.2.1 *Educational aspirations and expectations*

The quantitative data do not suggest that girls' educational *aspirations* to higher education at age 12 are predictive of early marriage (see Table 2). However, asked about their *expectations* of reaching that educational level we see a notable difference between those who were single, of whom 79 per cent answered positively compared to only 49 per cent of those who were married, suggesting reduced expectations among those who got married.

Among the case study girls most mentioned very high aspirations at age 12, including to become a doctor (2 cases), government worker (2 cases), or teacher (1 case); only Sessen who had not continued beyond grade 1 did not have any educational aspirations, but rather wanted to work to improve her livelihood. However, in practice several of the girls, according to the fieldworkers and some caregivers such as Beletech's aunt, did not seem interested in school.

5.2.2 *Marriage and continuing education*

When we consider the young people's current involvement in education in terms of their marital status, whereas over 60 per cent of the single children are still in school, only seven per cent of married children are at school (three attending regularly and one part time). One of those attending regularly was one of the three married boys (see Table 6).

Table 6: *Current educational attendance by marital status.*

	Not attending	Attending regularly	Attending irregularly	Attending part time	Total
N single	318	514	6	11	849
%	37.5	60.5	0.7	1.3	100
N married	53	3	0	1	55
%	96	5	0	2	100
Total	371	518	6	12	907

What are the profiles of the four women who are married and continuing with their education?

The woman who has progressed furthest with her education lives in Addis Ababa, and was a first year undergraduate student in Round 4 and got married aged 19 and one month. In her case family wealth may have been important in enabling her to continue with schooling. In Round 2, Nejat said she aspired to be a businesswoman. She had known her spouse for "over a month but less than a year", chose her own partner and has a written marriage contract. Her family contributed 30,000 birr and utensils worth 3,000 birr for the marriage, and his family contributed 25,000 birr. Her household was in the top wealth quintile in all the survey rounds, though she ranked the household as being "average" and "comfortable".

All the other three women lived in rural areas, one in a SNNP site and the other two in Amhara sites.

The only other case of a woman still in full time education was from an SNNP site. She had reached grade 8 and her household had improved in objective wealth ranking and considered itself as comfortable. Misrak was married at the age of 18 and four months. She aspired to get a degree and become a doctor. She had known her husband for over a year and the choice was made with her relatives. Her family provided 3,000 birr, land (0.8 hectares) and utensils worth 500 birr, and his relatives provided 5,000 birr and utensils worth 800 birr. Her household was ranked as being in the second quintile from the bottom in Round 1, but moved up to the top quintile in Round 2 and the fourth quintile in Round 3. They reported being "average" and "comfortable" both currently and four years earlier.

Both the girls from Amhara were married at 16 and had reached grade 10, and one was clearly from a poor household. Tizita got married at age 16 and eight months. She knew her husband for under a year and her parents had chosen him, but she said she had a say. It was a church marriage and they have a marriage contract; her family contributed 2,000 birr, his 3,000 birr, and he had livestock. Her household was ranked in the second from bottom quintile in Round 1 and in the bottom quintile in Rounds 2 and 3, and was ranked as "a little poorer than most" both four years earlier and at the time of the Round 4 survey, and as "not having quite enough" both four years previously and at the time of the survey.

The second woman from Amhara reached grade 8, but was only in part-time education as she was needed for domestic work and she was also not in full-time education the year before as she "did not achieve the grades". Her household seemed to have improved its status considerably. Eden aspired to reach grade 12 but was not sure she would reach that level and wanted to be a civil servant. She was married off at 16 by her parents without having a say in a church wedding, only met her spouse on her wedding day, and continued to live with her husband with her own family. Her family provided 2,000 birr and land (30,000m^2) and his 6,000 birr and land (10,000 m^2). Her household moved up from quintile 3 in Rounds 1 and 2 to quintile 4 in Round 3. She suggested they were "rich" four years earlier and she her household now was "comfortable". However, she complained about hard work.

From the cases above we can see that household wealth was probably important in enabling several of the girls to continue with their schooling, particularly among the older girls in Addis Ababa and SNNP sites.

5.2.3 Reasons for stopping school

Comparing the reasons for not being in full time education given by single adolescents to those of married adolescents, there is a much wider range of reasons mentioned by single young people (see Table 7). Among the married girls about half (26) mentioned marriage and one mentioned looking after a child. Married girls mentioned 24 other responses: six of these were to do work (four unpaid, one paid, and one wanting to start work); 14 had to do with schooling (five not wanting to go, five not understanding, two failing to achieve grades, and one each of books being too expensive, and ill-treatment from teachers); two others were due to family problems, and one due to disability.

Table 7. *Reasons for not being in full-time education by marital status and sex.*

Reasons	Single		Married		Both
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Marriage			2	26	28
Have to do paid work	47	9		1	57
Needed for domestic and/or agricultural work at home	25	4	1	4	34
Failed to achieve grades	25	15		2	
Wanted to start working	15	10		1	26
Truancy/does not want to go to school	12	9		5	26
Looking for work	11	7			18
Disability illness	9	10		1	20
Family member illness/disabled/elder	8	5			13
Family issues (Problems at home, disputes, marital conflict)	7	0		2	9
Fees too expensive	7	9			16
Books too expensive	7	5		1	13
Banned for behavioural problems	5	1			6
No need for school for future job	6	4			10
Shoes/uniform too expensive	5	5			10
Preparing university/education institution	4	1			5
Need to learn a skill	4				4
School too far	3	2			5
Quality of school poor	3				3
Terminated course	1	8			9
Can't understand language	1				1
Can't understand context of lessons/learn well	1			5	6
Banned away too long	1				1
Bullying abuse from peers		1			1
Ill-treatment from teachers	3			1	4
Quality of care (food, non-educational) poor	1				1
Need to look after child				1	1
Other	6	5		2	13

On the question whether they think they will return to education in the future there was a strong optimistic outlook among both single and married adolescents, but with a larger proportion of about two-thirds (65 per cent) of the single adolescents saying they definitely would return, compared to just over half the married ones (54 per cent) (see Table 8 below). Furthermore, the proportions saying they definitely would not return were lower among married (9 per cent) than single (14 per cent) adolescents. Among the married who said they definitely would return, two were divorced and two cohabitant.

Table 8. *Do you think you will return to education in the future?*

	Definitely not	Maybe	Probably	Yes, definitely	Total
Single N	10	10	4	45	69
%	14.5	14.5	5.8	65.2	100
Married N	2	5	3	12	22
%	9.1	22.7	13.6	54.5	100
Both N	12	15	7	57	91
%	13.2	16.5	7.7	62.6	100

Some evidence from the qualitative interviews suggests that there are often constraints on women returning to school once they have stopped, particularly after getting married. In some cases this may be because the child had not progressed far enough and therefore loses hope of managing to resume schooling, especially since they would be older than their peers and felt ashamed. For secondary and especially post-secondary education, cost may also be a factor and for evening classes, fears for girls' and women's safety were an issue (Tafere and Pankhurst 2015).

5.3 Work and teen marriage

Among the case study children all were involved in domestic chores from a young age. Birth order and gender of siblings can increase the work burden. Sessen was the last child and the only girl so she started looking after livestock at a young age. Likewise Beletech was the only girl, started doing domestic tasks at age 8 and felt she was overworked.

Regarding paid work, the proportion working at ages 12 and 15 among those married by the age of 19 were higher in the survey, although the difference was statistically significant only at age 15, suggesting that girls engaged in paid work are more likely to marry early (Table 9).

Table 9. *Paid work at the ages of 12 and 15 by marital status at age 19.*

	single		married %		Before 18		18 and above		total
Paid work at 12	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	
No	**88**	**352**	**12**	**48**	9.3	37	2.8	11	400
Yes	**79**	**15**	**21.1**	**4**	21.1	4	0.0	0	19
Total		**367**		**52**		41		11	419
Paid work at 15* **	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	
No	**89.1**	**350**	**10.9**	**43**	8.9	35	2.0	8	393
Yes	**65.4**	**17**	**34.6**	**9**	23.1	6	11.5	3	26
Total		**367**		**52**		41		11	419

In the rural sites all four Older Cohort girls in the qualitative sub-sample were involved in some form of wage labour.

Regarding the type of paid work in which they became involved, in Zeytuni in Tigray both Sessen and Haymanot worked in a stone crusher plant. In Leki in Oromia, both Ayu and Beletech worked in agriculture in irrigated land of private investors, Ayu also made fishing nets for sale and Beletech worked in her brother's shop. Only Fatima, living in Addis Ababa, was not involved in income-generating activities outside the household, and she was the only one who completed secondary school.

However, rather than the mere fact of engaging in paid labour or the combination of domestic and wage work, the possibility of escaping work responsibilities towards their parents or caregivers and starting their own life may have been more of an incentive to marry early. Beletech's aunt did not want her to marry and wanted her to continue with schooling. However, she was not interested in school, was not doing well in class, had a lot of domestic work at home and was involved in paid work. The prospect of a husband with a town house who would look after her no doubt was an attractive alternative that incited her to elope.

6. Intergenerational relations

There is a strong view in the literature, and it is a policy concern, that child marriage is forced, that the decision is made by the parents and imposed, and that the bride often does not even know the groom until the wedding day or may have been abducted (Jones et al. 2015). In this final section we consider the issue of choice of marriage partner in early and child marriage, decision-making over marriage, and parents' and children's agency.

6.1 Teen marriage and choice of marriage partner

There seems to be relationship between age and agency, although the numbers are too small to reach firm conclusions. None of the four 13-year-old girls chose their partner themselves and only one of the three 14-year-olds did, and one of the three 15-year-olds apparently decided together with parents (See Table 10). In contrast, if we consider those above the age of 15 half chose their partner themselves. Among the 19-year-olds, two out of three chose partners themselves.

Table 10. *Choice of partner by age of marriage.*

Choice of partner		Index child and other relatives together	Index child himself/herself	Parents or other relatives alone	Total
Age at marriage	13	0	0	4	4
	14	0	1	2	3
	15	1	0	2	3
	16	0	6	8	14
	17	0	4	9	13
	18	1	3	6	10
	19	0	2	1	3
Total		2	16	32	50

Regarding the type of marriage there were three cases where the girls said they were abducted, all three being in Oromia in three different sites, As we have seen, the national data suggest a higher prevalence of abduction in the south.

There also seems to be a relationship between the choice of partner and the length of time the couple have known each other. As would be expected, all nine cases where the girl met her spouse on her wedding day were arranged by parents. Likewise, most of those who had known their partner for under a month were grooms selected by parents. A greater proportion of girls that knew their partner for up to a year, and almost half those who had known their spouse for over a year, had made the choice themselves, as was also the case for the only instance where the couple had known each other since childhood (see Table 11).

Table 11. *Choice of partner by how long known.*

	On wedding day	<1 month	< 1year	>1year	Since childhood	Total
Choice by parent/relatives	9	8	7	8	0	32
Parent with child	0	1	0	1	0	2
Child alone	0	2	4	7	1	14
Total	9	11	11	16	1	48

The girls in the qualitative study all knew their partners well before they got married. Boys and girls interact more at school and increasingly in the workplace. Sessen met her husband at the crusher plant where they were working together. Beletech had been introduced to her husband by a friend of hers who was his relative. Ayu's future husband got to know her when he was working in the area and came to visit his sister, who was a neighbour of Ayu's family. Fatuma got to know her husband and was in a relationship with him for three months before he sent elders to propose. Haymanot's prospective husband also proposed by sending elders and a priest to her mother, who at first refused but later gave in.

6.2 Decision-making about marriage: parents' and children's agency

There is a common assumption in the literature that early marriages are enforced by parents on girls. However, the evidence from case material in the Young Lives qualitative sub-sample suggests that girls often have more say than is assumed and the decision-making is more complex than simply parental imposition. Moreover, as we shall see, the cultural context matters.

Fatuma, who lives in Addis, had been having a relationship with her future husband for several months before he sent elders to her mother to formalise the marriage when she was 18. When Fatima was 15 in 2008, her mother said she wanted to her to get a job and become independent rather than getting married.

However, three years later her mother still hoped her daughter would find a job. Regarding marriage prospects, she expressed the view that she would prefer a rich husband, adding: "I want her to end up in a good way. I want her to have a husband who is well endowed with riches. And in fact if I get a person who is rich, I would not hesitate to marry her with him". However, she went on to say that it was important that she had a husband who loved her even if he was poor. "I wish a good person for her, a good person with riches, who is good to her, who has Iman (fear of God). I wish they could love each other very much. I don't want her to marry someone for his money or riches. She would rather marry someone who is poor but loves her. He has to be compatible with her needs and age." In Fatuma's case she got to know her husband, who was a small-scale fruit and vegetable trader, without her mother's involvement, though she approved and they went through the formal procedures. Her family contributed 5,000 birr to the wedding and he provided 3,000 birr.

The two girls living in the site in Oromia were ostensibly married through abduction. However, in both cases this was 'voluntary' abduction or eloping through the girls' own decision. Nonetheless, peers and friends played an important part in persuading the girls; in both cases the boys had initially proposed, and in one case the girl and in the other her parents had initially refused the proposal.

Ayu got married at 16. She never progressed beyond grade 2 after dropping out due to illness and as we have seen was doing domestic and paid work. When she was 14, Ayu's mother was asked about what she thought her daughter would want to do two years later; she answered: "She will continue with her education, what else can she think?" Asked about marriage, she replied: "I don't think she thinks of marriage", adding "My wish is that she may continue with her education and complete. What does marriage do for her? It has no use". Her mother said she would object to her marrying but could not stop her. The fieldworker went on to ask, "What if she prefers to get married?" and she responded "What can we do in that case? Let her go". When the fieldworker followed on, asking "Do you permit her marriage?", her mother answered: "No, we don't. Unless she goes without asking us, we will not permit it. What can I do if she goes by her will without my knowledge? I can do nothing except accepting it."

Ayu's future husband got to know her when he was working in the area. Her parents had rejected another marriage proposal and when her future husband initially proposed, her parents had agreed but she refused. However, a year later she agreed for reasons that are unclear. She had dropped out of grade 3 before getting married and when pressed for a reason for this she said she had quarrelled with a teacher who said she "disturbed in class". Her mother claims they tried to persuade her to return to school but she refused. The work in the house and in wage labour may have been factors and possibly conflict between her parents, which her mother complained about, may have also contributed to her wanting to leave the family home. Her husband arranged a mock abduction. Two days later he sent elders and gradually the reconciliation and customary payments were made, though these were less than would have been expected with the customary bridewealth in the area. Commenting on her marriage, her mother said "I wish she married in a normal way, in normal procedure. She is married on her own interest. Her husband was sending elders but she refused to accept his proposal in the first time. In meantime, they met and discussed and agreed then he took her".

Likewise Beletech, an orphan living with her aunt, got married through 'voluntary abduction' but a year later than Ayu at the age of 17. Beletech was introduced to her future husband by a close friend of hers who was a relative of his, when he came to visit her. Her future husband proposed by sending elders but her aunt rejected the proposal, saying she had to continue with her education.

In 2008 her aunt expressed strong views against early marriage, saying: "I want her to be educated. I don't want her to be married. A married woman is like someone who goes to a prison. I want her to be educated and reach some level. I don't want to give her in marriage, no." Beletech at the time had suggested she was overworked and that her aunt wanted her to get married since she wanted to benefit from the bridewealth. She said: "I want to complete my education and become a doctor. They just expect me to get married and earn them dowry. They don't care if I learn or not. I wake up early in the morning, clean the house, cook food, take out the cows and go to school." However, when her aunt was asked about bridewealth she said: "What does that do for me? What did I benefit from marriage? I am suffering from backache and kidney problem. What did I benefit from being married?" Her aunt also expressed worries about her niece being seduced: "I don't want her to walk and fool around with boys. They tell girls that they love them and will marry them. The girls believe them [but they are lying]. That is the advice I give her." However, she recognised that she could not stop her getting married if she wanted to: "If she decides to quit school and get

married, what can I do? I can't force her; it is her choice. We want her to be successful; may God give her good character."

When interviewed in April 2011, Beletech was not yet married, though she expressed a fear of abduction. Asked if she thought her caregivers would want her to marry soon she answered: "No, they don't want. But I am afraid that I will be abducted". When the fieldworker asked "Is abduction still around?", she answered: "Yes, even though it is not as it used to be abduction is still present". She also expressed the view that she would want to live in the town but did not want to marry someone from the town but rather marry someone from the countryside and move to town with him. She suggested that she wanted to marry someone her family accepted, but added: "Actually, he first talks to me and then goes to see my parents. That is how marriage is now." When the fieldworker pursued the matter: "Okay, I see; what if your parents refuse to accept him even after he has spoken to you and you have agreed?" she answered: "I will marry the person". The fieldworker countered: "But earlier when we talked about this issue, you told me that you will totally keep your parents will" and she replied "No, I wanted to say; if my parents ask me to marry a good person I will, otherwise I won't marry". When the fieldworker questioned further: "What kind of person is good person to you?" She said: "Someone who has property and is hard working". Finally she answered affirmatively to the fieldworker's suggestion "So still I can say that it is you who decide whom to marry?" Although Beletech had not spent time with her future husband her friend persuaded her that he would look after her and take her to live in the nearby town, where she claimed he had a house as well as farming land in the rural area. After the abduction her husband sent elders to negotiate a settlement, which her aunt at first refused.

Although there are clear parallels between the elopement of Ayu and Beletech their cases can be considered to be somewhat different. In Ayu's case her parents had accepted his initial marriage offer and Ayu had refused but was later persuaded. In contrast, in Beletech's case her aunt had refused the proposal but Ayu eloped without her caregiver's consent through the intervention of her friend who was the boy's relative.

In the case of Haymanot, living in Tigray, family poverty and her mother's illness led her to drop out of school despite doing well and she started working in a crusher plant. When her husband sent elders to her mother to ask for her hand in marriage she accepted as she felt that given their poverty and inability to pay a dowry she should not refuse. Haymanot herself agreed partly to please her mother, and since she was not going to school, and found the work in the crusher plant hard, she saw marriage as a relief from wage labour.

When interviewed in 2008, Haymanot was 12 and said she did not want to get married until she was between 20 and 25 years old. However, at the time her mother, who was not well, was already thinking about her marriage. She said: "I have keen interest and dream to marry her to someone either through earning money (job), spinning cotton or selling crops, my dream as a mother and as what others do, is to marry her to somebody". However, she was concerned that being poor and not able to afford dowry it would be difficult to find a husband since "no one looks to the poor for marriage". Her mother was also hoping her daughter would be able to support her and said: "I expect her to help and support me. I also wish her to marry and have kids, to learn and graduate her education, get employed and then support her life and my life as well".

However, when interviewed three years later Haymanot was already married at the age of 15. In the mean-time she had dropped out of school from grade 5 and started wage labour in a stone crusher plant to look after her mother, who was ill. She said to the fieldworker: "It is

because I don't go to school and I want to get some rest from the work", arguing that domestic chores were less arduous than the paid labour. Her mother suggested she accepted the proposal since she would be living close by, unlike her older daughter who was living in a nearby town, and she felt lucky that they were accepting her without a dowry. She said:

> "They convinced me that my daughter is lucky because other girls get a husband only if they can contribute a cow, ox or other wealth. They may not even get as good a husband as my daughter's fiancé. Perhaps, the spirit of the dead ancestors in her family and their wealth has attracted this marriage … they accepted my idea that I am not going to pay anything for the marriage … I started to consider the advantages that I will have by letting her marry a man who is from my own community, who is a good farmer and it is good if my daughter is close to me; because I can get her any time I want her. But if she goes to town or far places, I will be in trouble. I will get a man who can treat me as a mother and have people who may consider me as their sister and daughter. This way, I allowed them to take her and she is currently staying there."

7. Conclusions

In this paper we have reviewed the international and Ethiopian national context of child marriage, which has become a pressing policy concern. We make use of Young Lives data from the Older Cohort interviewed when they were 19, as well as three earlier rounds of surveys and three rounds of qualitative interviews, to understand the dynamics of child and early marriage. As we have evidence for marriage before the legal age of 18, as well as two years after, we are able to compare child and early marriage and have also considered differences between early teen, mid teen and late teen marriage.

We suggest that child marriage can best be explained by a combination of factors interacting at three different levels: community, household and individual.

At the community level the findings fit with and confirm evidence from other studies in Ethiopia that child and early marriage is largely a rural phenomenon, and in our sample it was more common in small rather than large towns or cities. In regional terms early marriage is more common in the Oromia and Amhara sites than in the ones in Tigray and SNNP. However, when we consider early teen marriage is it more common in the communities in Amhara and Tigray. Despite regional differences there are also considerable site-level variations, suggesting that local cultural norms and factors preventing early marriage matter; we find sites with few or no cases of early marriage in regions with high prevalence, suggesting that there are what has been termed 'hotspots' of child marriage (Presler-Marshall et al. 2015). Some case material of early teen marriage in Tigray and Amhara suggests that these may be related to poverty and girls from poor families seeking to marry into better-off families.

Regarding household characteristics the survey data reveal that parental education matters. As the level of parental education increases the proportion married early declines. Interestingly this was found to be more statistically significant for fathers rather than mothers, suggesting that fathers may have more say in deciding on their daughters' marriages. The death or absence of parents and especially fathers was also found to be important. Although this was not found to be statistically significant in the survey, in the qualitative sub-sample

four out of the five married girls had lost their father and the fifth had a father who was not supporting the household. Household wealth was also found to be important. Only 10 per cent of married girls in Round 4 had parents in the top tercile in Round 1, as compared to 38 per cent of girls who were not married. Interestingly the significance decreases steadily from Round 1 through Round 2 to Round 3, suggesting that the household's earlier circumstances are more predictive of later early marriage.

Regarding individual characteristics the gender imbalance is stark, leading to the question of what explains the few cases of teen marriage of boys, two of which were in sites in SNNP and one in Oromia. In one case in SNNP it seems that poverty was a driving factor as the boy came from a poor background and went to live with his wife's family, whereas in the Oromia case the boy came from a household whose wealth status had improved.

Education was found to be associated with remaining single and the proportion of married girls dwindles among those who have progressed beyond primary school. However, consideration of the case material suggests that the girls did not leave school in order to get married but rather that they had left school mainly due to poverty, shocks and family problems, became engaged in work to support their families and only subsequently decided to get married. Though educational aspirations do not seem to be predictive of later marriage, expectations of reaching the aspired educational level are lower among those who got married.

There are constraints on women who are married attending education and only three married girls were in full-time education and one in part-time schooling. Consideration of these cases suggests that some come from families whose wealth status has been improving. About half the married girls mentioned marriage as a reason for stopping school. However there were also responses to do with both paid and unpaid work, problems with school including an inability to understand, failing to achieve grades, ill-treatment and cost, as well as family problems and disability. Regarding returning to schooling once they interrupted both single and married children had an optimistic outlook, but greater proportions among those who were single said they definitely would return. The qualitative data suggest that girls who are married may be embarrassed to go back to school and study with younger children especially if they have not reached higher grades, and that for higher education cost maybe a constraint for girls from poorer households.

The survey data revealed a strong relationship between engagement in paid work and teen marriage, although this was found to be statistically significant only for paid work at age 15 but not at 12. Among the case study children all had been involved in domestic work from a young age, and all those in rural sites were involved in paid work, which differed by site. However, rather than simply engagement in paid work as such, juggling the combination of domestic and paid work with schooling was often a challenge for children, and especially if their family was poor and they faced shocks they tended to drop out of school. Having stopped going to school, some girls considered marriage a more pleasant prospect than continued involvement in arduous wage labour. Arguably, family circumstances played a crucial role in girls becoming engaged in work, and shocks related to ill-health of the child or a parent and drought compounded poverty and the need for children to support their families by working. Marriage was seen by some girls as involving routine chores while escaping work under their parents' or caregivers' control, and seemed an attractive prospect.

In considering intergenerational relations in marital decision-making and the agency of girls the evidence suggests that younger teenage girls had less say in choosing a partner and that

girls who had known their partner longer were more likely to have made the choice themselves. The case studies suggest that decision-making about marriage is not straightforward and that the assumption that it is simply as a result of imposition of parental does not fit with the evidence of girls' agency. The context also matters. In the case of the two girls who got married under the legal age in Oromia they decided on 'voluntary' abduction or elopement, in part to circumvent the customary costs of brideprice and settle for reconciliation through lower compensation payments. In both cases the boy had proposed by sending elders to the caregivers; in one case the caregivers refused but the girl agreed, and in the other the girl refused but later agreed. In Tigray the expectation of dowry was a constraint for poor families with girls. In one case the mother was chronically ill and wanted to see her daughter married and accepted a proposal from a man who did not expect dowry, and the girl, who had given up school to work and care for her mother, agreed to the marriage in preference to wage labour. In the other case, the girl likewise preferred marriage to paid work in the same stone crusher plant. Only the girl in Addis was not involved in paid work and she got married above the legal age. She had interrupted her schooling and had completed some vocational training but preferred to marry rather than look for work, and was in a relationship for several months before her husband proposed by sending elders to her mother.

In sum, although the survey data suggest that parental imposition is still strong in particular among younger girls, the case material suggests that girls have more agency in marriage than tends to be assumed. However, their decision-making is constrained by customary norms of dowry in Tigray and bridewealth in Oromia, which disadvantages girls from poorer households. Family circumstances and especially health and drought shocks can pressurise girls to interrupt school and to undertake wage labour to support their families. However, the prospect of starting their own household and avoiding wage labour seems to have been an important incentive in girls' decision-making to form relationships and accept marriage proposals.

8. Policy considerations

The findings suggest there is a need to consider variations in cultural norms and community values to promote a reduction in child marriage. Early teenage marriage customs in northern Ethiopia, particularly in Amhara, present particularly serious risks for younger teenage girls aged 13 to 15. Dowry payments from the girls' parents found in Tigray and brideprice gifts from the groom's family in Oromia are constraints, especially for children from poor families, which can lead to abductions or elopements.

Variations between communities in the extent of child marriage even within the same region point to the presence of 'hotspots' and potential areas where interventions may have been more effective, suggesting the need to focus on areas where the problem is most salient and to learn from positive experiences of abandoning early marriage practices.

Poverty and household shocks, including drought, parental death and illness of the parent or the child, clearly have a major part to play in young girls becoming more involved in paid work, often leading to them dropping out of school. Without further prospects of education or gainful employment, marriage is often the alternative that they may be persuaded or wish to accept.

The importance of education of girls and of parental education in avoiding early marriage and the likelihood that most girls who get married are unable to continue with school, suggest the need for greater promotion of girls' education, particularly for those from poor backgrounds, including more flexible schooling options to enable those who have to work to continue with schooling. There is also a need for promoting opportunities for married women to continue with their education and for those with babies to have access to child care.

The findings also suggest that younger teenage girls have less say in decision-making over the choice of partner, so that it is important to emphasise special protection of girls in their early teens. The case material found that girls in their later teens had considerably more choice in the selection of partner, sometimes against parental wishes, although this was constrained by poverty and social norms relating to marriage payments. Policies and programmes seeking to reduce child marriage should therefore distinguish between early and late teens and pay greater attention to girls' agency and their ability to stand up to parental imposition of early marriage.

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The Interplay Between Community, Household and Child Level Influences on Trajectories to Early Marriage in Ethiopia: Evidence from Young Lives

Child marriage is a global concern and a priority issue for the African Union; the Ethiopian government has devised a strategy to eliminate the practice by 2025. In this paper we analyse Young Lives survey and qualitative data from girls aged 19 to understand pathways to early marriage, which we argue can best be explained by a combination of interacting factors at community, household and individual levels.

Our findings confirm that child marriage is primarily a female, rural phenomenon, with regional and local differences related to cultural norms. Early teen marriage is more common in regions in the north and is often related to family poverty. Customs of dowry in the north and bridewealth in the south present constraints, especially for teenagers from poorer families.

Household characteristics are also important; parental education, especially that of the father, reduces the likelihood of child marriage. Parental death and absence was highlighted in the qualitative case material. Household wealth was particularly significant, with less than 10 per cent of early marriages among the top tercile, and family circumstances such as ill-health and drought were compounding factors. Parental imposition of marriage was stronger and girls' agency more limited among the younger teenage girls, whereas older teenagers were more likely to make their own marital choices.

The gender imbalance is stark, with 13 per cent of teenage girls married compared to less than 1 per cent of boys. Girls continuing with schooling were less likely to get married, but most left school first due to family poverty and problems. Paid work at 15 was found to be statistically significant as a predictor of early marriage, while case material suggests that some girls chose marriage over jobs involving hard labour. Once married, return to schooling was constrained by social norms and childcare.

The findings suggest a need to recognise that there are early marriage 'hotspots', and conversely areas where the practice is declining faster which can provide important lessons for interventions. Policies should further promote girls' education, including for already married girls, and focus more on protection for younger teenager girls who are at more risk from imposed marriages.

Young Lives

An International Study of Childhood Poverty

About Young Lives

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty, involving 12,000 children in 4 countries over 15 years. It is led by a team in the Department of International Development at the University of Oxford in association with research and policy partners in the 4 study countries: Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam.

Through researching different aspects of children's lives, we seek to improve policies and programmes for children.

Young Lives Partners

Young Lives is coordinated by a small team based at the University of Oxford, led by Professor Jo Boyden.

- *Ethiopian Development Research Institute, Ethiopia*
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- *Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visvavidyalayam (Women's University), Andhra Pradesh, India*
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