

 IDE Discussion Papers are preliminary materials circulated to stimulate discussions and critical comments

IDE DISCUSSION PAPER No. 404

**Relationship between Young Women
and Parents in Rural Ethiopia**

Yuka KODAMA*

March 2013

Abstract

In rural Ethiopia, parents play an important role in the major life events of their daughters such as education and marriage. However, parents' roles have been evolving, likely due to the rapid expansion of educational opportunities for girls and the growing need of cash income among rural households. Currently, encouraging their daughters to take up further education and jobs in the formal sector contrasts with rural Ethiopian women's conventional life course events in the past, which are characterized by early marriage and low educational profiles. An interview analysis with parents of young women indicated that under the continuing de-agrarianization among rural households, women are expected to have their own cash income generating activities to qualify as marriage partners.

Keywords: young women, parents, education, marriage, Ethiopia

JEL classification: R23, Z13

* Senior Researcher, Africa Study Group, Area Studies Center, IDE
(Yuka_Kodama@ide.go.jp)

The Institute of Developing Economies (IDE) is a semigovernmental, nonpartisan, nonprofit research institute, founded in 1958. The Institute merged with the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) on July 1, 1998. The Institute conducts basic and comprehensive studies on economic and related affairs in all developing countries and regions, including Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Oceania, and Eastern Europe.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s). Publication does not imply endorsement by the Institute of Developing Economies of any of the views expressed within.

INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPING ECONOMIES (IDE), JETRO
3-2-2, WAKABA, MIHAMA-KU, CHIBA-SHI
CHIBA 261-8545, JAPAN

©2013 by Institute of Developing Economies, JETRO

No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior permission of the IDE-JETRO.

Introduction

Because the demographic presence of young people is said to strongly influence societies, there are various debates on their social role and status in developing countries. For example, in 2007, the United Nations stated that they expected young people to act as a “growth engine” from the perspective of national development [United Nations 2007].

However, in less developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan African countries, the roles of young people in society have been discussed from perspectives other than just being “a hope of the future,” such as being a threat to the social order and victims of society especially among the female youth [Argenti 2002, 124-125, 134; de Waal 2002, 13; Ansell 2005, 18,32]. Due to political tension between generations, young people can be regarded as “a threat to the established order” due to the political tension between generations because, despite them outnumbering their elders, traditional political structures have always been dominated by adults and elders [de Waal, 2002: 13, Argenti, 2002: 150]. Therefore, analyses of young people’s daily lives need to consider the relationships based on power between the elders and young people.

In rural Ethiopia, parents have a strong influence over their children’s lives, particularly with regard to education and marriage. In many cases, children economically dependent on their parents have little power in making daily decisions against their parents’ wishes. On the basis of the literature regarding remittances in developing countries [Lucas and Stark 1985; Hoddinott 1994; Vanwey 2004], it can be assumed that parents focus more on balancing the current economic situation of their households and investing in their children to gain future return. However, little qualitative research has been conducted on parents’ opinions regarding the relationships with their children, especially their daughters.

Kodama [2012] elucidates the changes in the daily lives and opinions among young women in rural Ethiopia with regard to the increasing livelihood diversification and the available educational and economic opportunities.

Interviews with young women indicated that parents' changing opinions about their daughters' life courses influenced their lives in aspects such as education, marriage, and economic activity. Unlike past literature on young women in rural Ethiopia, parents have encouraged their daughters to pursue further education and engage in cash income activities, emphasizing on obtaining governmental jobs; this has resulted in increasing the ideal marriageable age among women. Kodama [2012], however, misses the motive why parents have been open to the changes in the life courses of their daughters. Therefore, this study explores parents' opinions, parent–daughter relationships, the motives for investing in daughters' education, and their support provided to attain jobs.

This paper examines the opinions of parents about their daughters' life courses through interviews. It primarily focuses on parents whose daughters have completed school education, rather than those whose daughters are currently students, because it is assumed that these parents have a clearer notion about the long-term relationships with their daughters who, after completing their education, aim to make a livelihood for themselves.

The following section reviews the discussions about women's education and marriage, and age-related issues in the Ethiopian context. The subsequent section marks the research area and methodology. Section 3 analyzes in-depth interviews conducted with parents of young women, along with updated information on the status of young women who participated in previous research for Kodama [2012].

1. Marriage, Education, and Aging in the Ethiopian Context

This section examines the literature related to marriage, women's education, and aging in Ethiopia to understand the changing circumstances surrounding young women and rural households.

1-1 Marriage

Marriage, similar to childbearing, is an important event that marks the

transition to adulthood [Van de Walle 1993; Tambashe and Shapiro 1996, 1029; Yabiku 2004, 561; Mensch, Singh and Casterline 2005, 3; Grant and Furstenberg 2007, 118]. After marriage, women form economically independent households, different from their natal ones, and live separately and away, especially under the custom of patrilocal marriage.

Although early marriage has been highlighted as unique among Ethiopian customs [Haile 1994, 35; Berihun and Aspen 2010], there are various types of marriage in Ethiopia according to region, such as marriage by abduction (*T'ilf*), and polygamy [Pankhurst 1992, 102-103; Women's Affairs Office and World Bank 1998]. Given the word count limitations, this section reviews only the customs in the Amhara region where the research was conducted.

In most cases, early marriage is arranged by the parents of the bride and groom [Hoben 1973, 58-59; Pankhurst 1992, 103-105]. In the Amhara region, the conventional custom is for both parties to prepare equal quantities of assets, usually the same number of oxen and cows [Women's Affairs Office and World Bank 1998, 15].

Another unique characteristic is the high divorce rate among Amhara people [Pankhurst 1992; Tilson and Larsen 2000]. Tilson and Larsen [2000] attributed this high divorce rate to the custom of early marriage; their research revealed higher divorce rates among women who married at before 15 years of age than those who married after.

It must be noted that, Ethiopia increased its legal marriageable age from 15 to 18 years in 2005. The local people have recognized the law although this measure has not fully prevented the continuance of the tradition of early marriage (USAID 2008).¹

1-2 Education

¹ An interview with a police officer at the research area in August 2011 also backed the same situation about marriage in rural area.

On the basis of trend of late marriages in industrialized countries, education has been widely attributed as an influencing factor in raising the marriageable age among women [Grant and Furstenberg 2007]. Despite this, its effect in developing countries has been mixed, in part due to the heterogeneity of young people, blurring the educational effect [Yabiku 2004; Mensch, Singh and Casterline 2005]. However, education is still an important factor affecting marriageable age, apart from urbanization, a decline in arranged marriages, and changing laws and norms [Mensch, Singh and Casterline 2005].

Like other areas in Ethiopia, the research area was expanded under the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP)—the Ethiopian government’s policy for education that commenced operations since 2002.² ESDP aims to improve the gross primary education enrollment rate along with geographical and gender equity [Lasonen, Kemppainen and Raheem 2005, 20]. The program includes building schools in remote areas, shorter school days in rural areas, and free education until grade 10 [Lasonen, Kemppainen and Raheem 2005, 20]. The 2007 census showed improvement in literacy rates in rural areas of the South Gondar zone, where the research area locates [Office of the Population Census Commission n.d.]. Women aged 10–14 years recorded the highest literacy rate at 53.3%, followed by women aged 15–19 years at 42.5%; the literacy rate dropped drastically for older women.

However, the quality of education has not been able to keep up with the rapid educational expansion in rural areas. The data provided by the Ministry of Education of the Amhara Regional States indicated that rural students experienced more difficulties in continuing their education to subsequent grades than urban students. For example, the 2011/12 data showed a 52% decline in the number of 8th and 9th grade students, 3044 and 1477 students respectively, in the *woreda* where this research locates. On the other hand, in Bahir Dar, the Amhara regional capital, the number of 8th grade students was 5431, while that of 9th grade students was 6318—a difference of +16%.

² Although ESDP was launched in 1997, the program was not fully operational until the war ended against Eritrea (1998–2000) [Yamada 2005]. ESDP IV is currently under operation [MoFED 2010].

Despite the possibilities that rural students move to urban areas for better educational prospects, the decreased number cannot be absorbed in the increase at Bahir Dar.

The data also showed that children have difficulties obtaining higher education in terms of the number of 11th grade students at the secondary school in the *woreda* where the research area locates as the number is only 43% of that of 10th-grade students.³ However, female students show a relatively higher rate of progressing to the 11th grade than males—44% and 41%, respectively. The significant difference between the 10th and 11th grades indicates a high dropout rate after the 10th grade because of the failure of national test for further education.

Yisak [2010] attributed low completion rates to various aspects of poverty within students' households. He reported that poverty forces children to work in their households while attending school, resulting in low achievement, high drop-out rate, and late admittance into school.

1-3 Aging Issues

Welfare among the elderly is an emerging issue in Ethiopia. Although the elderly are generally cared for by their children, especially by their sons, and rural communities, this system has become dysfunctional on account of urban and international migration of children and the collapse of mutual support systems in rural communities, which is in turn caused by de-agrarianization [Assefa Baleher 2010, 41; Lwanga-Ntale and Knox 2011].

Furthermore, Ethiopia lacks the system of universal pension. This can be attributed to issues of financial infeasibility and overlapping with the other social security programs [Lwanga-Ntale and Knox 2011, 32]. Existing projects for food security to “the poorest of the poor in the community,” including the elderly, have limited accessibility, being available only in the drought prone

³ Data for the number of students moving to the urban area are not available.

areas [Lwanga-Ntale and Knos 2011, 32]. Therefore, social security for the elderly in most rural areas is still family- or local-community dependent.

2. Research Methodology

This study was conducted at a marketplace surrounded by agricultural villages in the South Gondar Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia, in September 2012. Even though the area has been suffering from an acute land shortage, regional government officials still classify it as a crop-surplus area. Considering that the market area has been attracting landless people from surrounding agricultural villages, the livelihood situation in the research area is estimated to be at the forefront of rural changes, indicative of the future of surrounding agricultural villages with regard to livelihood diversification.

Among many, I selected 52 young women, aged 15–29 years, in the August 2011 research.⁴ In September 2012, I conducted interviews, with 11 parents and one grandfather of young women who were interviewed in August 2011. Among the 12 interviewees, 10 were parents/grandfather of the young women who had completed their education and were economically dependent, while two were parents of young women who were students when previous interviews were conducted in August 2011.

I also conducted a follow-up research with seven previous research participants from August 2011—two students and five non-students. In addition, on interviewing with their parents and neighbors, I verified the current status of the 12 participants in the 2011 survey (but not of the September 2012 research), who at that time had been students or living with their parents.

3. Research Results

3-1 Changes from the August 2011 Research

⁴ Please refer Kodama [2012] for the details of the research in August 2011.

This section briefly reviews the status changes among young women from August 2011 to September 2012. These research participants had been living with their parents during the 2011 research.

The chart shown below indicates several changes in the status of young women dependent on their parents during the research conducted in August 2011. Of those who were students in August 2011, five among the 16 dropped out after a year because of the failure of national test for promotion, poverty, and employment in a city.

The frequency of non-students moving out is more than that of students, with six out of 10 leaving the research area because of employment-related reasons. While two of them migrated to urban Ethiopian cities, three migrated or considered migrating to the Middle East to seek jobs, usually as housemaids. The remaining one was been transferred to the other rural area as a health worker.

Chart: Changes in the status of young women from August 2011 to September 2012^{*1}

Status in August 2011		Age ^{*2}	Status in August 2012	
Students	Private colleges	18	Looking for job in a big city (Bahir Dar)	Students → looking for job
	University	21	University student	Student → student
	12 th grade	22	University student	
	12 th grade	18	University student	
	12 th grade	18	University student	
	11 th grade	18	Completed 12 th grade, and moving to university	
	10 th grade	18	12 th grade	
	10 th grade	20	12 th grade	
	10 th grade	18	12 th grade	
	8 th grade	17	10 th grade	
	8 th grade	15	8 th grade student at a different school	
	10 th grade	15	Employed at a Hotel in Bahir Dar	Students → wage worker
	9 th grade	18	Failed 10 th grade examinations	Students → Non-students
	9 th grade	16	Failed 10 th grade examinations	
	8 th grade	16	Completing 8 th grade	
	8 th grade	16	Giving up 9 th grade due to poverty	
Non-student living with and dependent on parents in August 2011.	Working w/mother	22	Same	Working with mother
	Working w/mother	20	Same	
	Working w/mother	15	Same	
	Working w/mother	18	Same	
	Health worker	22	Job transfer	Rural-rural move
	Stay w/ parents	20	Looking for job at a big city (Gondar)	Migrate to urban areas
	Stay w/ parents	20	Looking for job at Addis Ababa	
	Stay w/ parents	20	Migrated to Jeddah	International migration
	Stay w/ parents	23	Migrated to Jeddah	
	Stay w/ parents	23	Going to migrate to Jeddah	

^{*1} As August and September is the end and start of the academic year, respectively, the answers regarding their grades is somewhat confused. Some answered in terms of the grade that followed, while others answered in terms of their present grade. Therefore, grade-related data is inconsistent.

^{*2} Age as of August 2011

3-2 Parents' Opinions about their Daughters' Lives

Given no effective public welfare system for the elderly at the time of the research, an assumption was made that parents would invest in their daughters' education in the expectation of future return as they aged. However, interviews revealed that parents' primary concern about their daughters was that they marry appropriate husbands, thus encouraging their daughters to study to get the jobs that would make them eligible marriage partners. Therefore, the above assumption was rejected as parents denied the notion of investing in their daughters' education for future return in their old age. Most parents commented that they were uncertain of their future relationships with their children, particularly those in relation to finance. However, the parents were hopeful that their children provided them with some support.

The father of a university student (Research #1) complained about the unexpected educational and living expenses he had to bear for his daughter studying at an urban university located away from the research area. However, he commented that his younger daughters would also go to university if they fared well in their examinations. He and his wife expressed their concern in the case that their daughters quit school, stating that they would be home bound and unemployed because of the inadequate economic opportunities available to them in the research area. Although they were concerned about the importance of their daughters' employment, they were uncertain about the future financial support they would receive from their daughters in return for their investment. Below is the response to the question "which of your children will help you financially in the future?"

Well, [who] knows their destiny! So at any time we have only lucks. So [we just] raised them...So I don't know their destiny. Their destiny might be resulting in being rich.

Parents primarily invested in their daughters' education to ascertain their high earnings thereby increasing their chances of marrying wealthy men. Parents

were of the opinion that income generation of their daughters would increase their chances of getting a “wealthy” husband. The basic condition for marriage seems to be evolving from marriage payment of oxen to regular income generation.

The widowed mother of a daughter (#31) seeking a job in Bahir Dar after completing her Diploma of Computer Science explained that she got her daughter educated because it would be fairly difficult for her daughter to find a suitable match if she was without a job. In response to my question on drastic changes from the past when women could marry without generating income, the mother replied,

Yes, it was. But now as life (expense) becomes expensive, husband will get married a woman who has a job.

Despite the hope of both parents and young women alike, finding employment seems difficult even in urban cities. This is particularly so if young women did not have a university education. The above chart indicates that young women leave their families behind in rural areas in search for jobs. This was not perceived as parental pressure upon their daughters to generate income for their households. Most interviewees whose daughters left for urban cities or migrated to the Middle East in search for jobs, explained of their daughters’ determination to independently make good earnings or the sense of guilt they experienced for staying idle at home. We take the case of #11: a young woman who was interviewed last year had left for Gondar to look for a job because, according to her parents, she felt guilty for not contributing anything to the household; because of job unavailability in the research area, she decided to move to Gondar and live at her relative’s house. However, her mother explained that despite her efforts, she is still unemployed.

The three young women who had been interviewed the previous year left for the Middle East to seek job opportunities. Parents did not force that their daughters to migrate because of the high migration costs. In such cases, however, parents expected remittances from their daughters because most

parents paid these high migration costs, usually ranging from 10,000 to 50,000 Ethiopian Birr,⁵ either by borrowing from relatives or availing of a bank loan by mortgaging their houses.

However, some parents, especially single mothers from poorer households, expected their daughters to support them financially. Each of the four young women who contributed to the household's income working with their mothers during the August 2011 research continued to work with their mothers in September 2012. They explained that they worked for their mothers, and all their earnings were controlled by their mothers. Each of them worked full-time jobs, sometimes exceeding that of their mothers, and thus evidently shouldered the economic responsibilities of their households. In addition, although their mothers expressed the desire that their daughters marry in the future, they expressed the concern that after they did get their daughters married, they would find living without them physically and financially challenging. One single mother expressed her appreciation toward her 18-year-old daughter's contribution to the household and reported that it would be difficult to maintain the same standard of living without her contribution. She hoped that she could continue to live and work with her daughter even after her marriage.

Now she (my daughter) is the main person to work [at my house]. She works very hard.... [When she get married], she will take me and live together (#22).

According to her daughter's follow-up interview, she agreed to live with her mother even after her marriage. She felt that it was her responsibility to care for her mother despite having a younger brother who had just begun work at Bahir Dar.

Although parents did not overtly express their expectations of their daughters, daughters seemed to have an implicit pressure to contribute toward households considering that the daughters' decision to migrate out of their home town.

⁵ One US dollar = 18.52 Ethiopian Birr (as of 21 February, 2013)

Conclusion

Although the heterogeneity of parents' opinions about their relationships with their daughters reflects the diverse life courses of young women, most parents' primary concern is their daughters' marriage. Unlike conventional rural customs of marriage that involves the exchange of livestock, parents regard their daughters' ability to generate cash income as being a determining factor in their eligibility to find a suitable husband. Interviews indicated that peasants were not attractive choices as marriage partners for their daughters.

Parents' economic expectations of their daughters varied according to their daughters' economic activities. Higher their investment in their daughters' education or that of obtaining jobs, higher was their expected return. Daughters who obtained government jobs were expected to support their parents because of a steady flow of income. It must be noted that at least a Diploma is required to secure a government job. The parents also had high expectations from daughters who migrated to the Middle East because they felt that it was their contribution and savings that enabled their daughters to be employed in the Middle East. Moreover, poorer households expected financial support from their daughters, and some young women had evolved into becoming the primary breadwinners of their households.

Although parents expected their daughters to marry in the future, marriage did not seem to be the urgent issue that it used to be when early marriage was the conventional custom. Earning cash income is critical for young women, in either relatively wealthier or relatively poorer households.

As Kodama [2012] indicates, rapid rural changes have affected young women's lives through delayed marriage and the increasing importance of women's economic activities. Parents have also modified their thoughts to align with the changes. However, since these changes have begun only during the last decade, long-term changes in relationships between parents and daughters are left for further research.

Acknowledgements

My deepest appreciation goes to Addis Ababa University to have provided supports for my research. Special thanks also go to Ms Haregwoin Kebede for Amharic transcription. I also would like to thank Enago (www.enago.jp) for the English language review. The responsibility of any errors is of course mine. Finally, I gratefully appreciate kindness and generosity of people in the research area that made it possible to conduct this research.

References

*Ethiopian names are written in order of the author's name and father's name.

- Ansell, Nicola 2005. *Children, Youth and Development*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Argenti, Nicolas 2002. "Youth in Africa: A Major Resources for Change." in *Young Africa: Realising the Rights of Children and Youth*, ed. De Waal and Argenti. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World: 123-153.
- Assefa Baleher 2010. "Profiles of Older Persons in Ethiopia." in *Inter-Generational Challenges in Ethiopia: Understanding Family, Children, and the Elderly*, ed. Gebre Yntiso. Addis Ababa: Ethiopia Society of Sociologists, Social Workers, and Anthropologists: 41-52.
- Berihun, M. Mekonnen and Harald. Aspen 2010. "Early Marriage and the Campaign against It in Ethiopia." in *Research in Ethiopian Studies: Selected Papers of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Trondheim July 2007*, ed. Aspen, Birhanu Teferra, Shferaw Bekele and Ege. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz: 432-443.
- de Waal, Alexander 2002. "Realising Child Rights in Africa: Children, Young People and Leadership." in *Young Africa: Realising the Rights of Children and Youth*, ed. De Waal and Argenti. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World: 1-28.
- Grant, MJ and FF Furstenberg 2007. "Changes in the Transition to Adulthood in Less Developed Countries." *European Journal of Population/Revue européenne de Démographie*, 23 (3): 415-428.
- Haile, Gabriel Dagne 1994. "Early Marriage in Northern Ethiopia." *Reproductive Health Matters*, 2 (4): 35-38.
- Hoben, A 1973. *Land Tenure among the Amhara of Ethiopia: The Dynamics of*

- Cognatic Descent*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hoddinott, John 1994. "A Model of Migration and Remittances Applied to Western Kenya." *Oxford Economic Papers*, 46 (3): 459-476.
- Kodama, Yuka 2012. "Young Women's Economic Daily Lives in Rural Ethiopia" (IDE Discussion Paper). Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies.
(http://ir.ide.go.jp/dspace/bitstream/2344/1137/1/ARRIDE_Discussion_No.344_kodama.pdf).
- Lasonen, Johanna, Raija Kemppainen and Kolawole Raheem 2005. *Education and Training in Ethiopia: An Evaluation of Approaching EFA Goals*. Jyväskylä: Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä.
- Lucas, REB and O Stark 1985. "Motivations to Remit: Evidence from Botswana." *The Journal of Political Economy*, 93 (5): 901-918.
- Lwanga-Ntale, Charles and Alison Rusinow Charles Knos 2011. "Social Protection for Older People in the Context of Economic Growth: the Case for Ethiopia- Issues, Opportunities and Choices." in *People at Risk: Towards a Comprehensive Social Protection Scheme in Ethiopia: Proceeding of the Seventh Annual Conference of the ESSSWA*, ed. ESSSWA. Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists: 21-37.
- Mensch, BS, S Singh and J Casterline 2005. *Trends in the Timing of First Marriage among Men and Women in the Developing World*. New York: Population Council, Policy Research Division.
- MoFED 2010. *Ethiopia: 2010 MDGs Report: Trends and Prospects for Meeting MDGs by 2015*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED).
- Office of the Population Census Commission n.d. *The 2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Statistical Tables for the 2007* [CD-ROM]. Addis Ababa: Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia.
- Pankhurst, Helen 1992. *Gender, Development and Identity: An Ethiopian Study*. London: Zed Books.
- Tambashe, B.O. and D. Shapiro 1996. "Family Background and Early Life Course Transitions in Kinshasa." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58 (4): 1029-1037.

- Tilson, Dana and Ulla Larsen 2000."Divorce in Ethiopia: The Impact of Early Marriage and Childlessness." *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 32 (03): 355-372.
- United Nations 2007. *World Youth Report 2007*. New York: United Nations.
- Van de Walle, E 1993."Recent Trends in Marriage Ages." in *Demographic Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Foote, Hill and Martin. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press: 117–152.
- Vanwey, Leah. K. 2004."Altruistic and Contractual Remittances between Male and Female Migrants and Households in Rural Thailand." *Demography*: 739-756.
- Women's Affairs Office and World Bank 1998. *Implementing the Ethiopian National Policy for Women: Institutional and Regulatory Issues*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
- Yabiku, ST 2004."Marriage Timing in Nepal: Organizational Effects and Individual Mechanisms." *Social Forces*, 83 (2): 559-586.
- Yamada, Shoko. 2005. "Educational Finance and Poverty Reduction: The Cases of Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia" (GRIPS Development Forum Discussion Paper). Tokyo: National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies.
- Yisak Tafere 2010. "Changing Educational Aspirations of Children Living in Poverty in Ethiopia" (Working Paper No.58). Oxford: Young Lives, Department of International Development, University of Oxford.