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Female Empowerment and Social Institution

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The aim of this research is to improve our understanding of seemingly gender-discriminatory social institution in the developing world, from the perspective of economic development and female empowerment. On one hand, social institution may be manifestation of women's disempowerment. On the other hand, it may play a role in enhancing women's welfare in the context where women's human rights are not sufficiently protected. To meet this research objective, two empirical studies using micro-level data are conducted.

Why Is the Practice of Levirate Marriage Disappearing in Africa? HIV/AIDS as an Agent of Institutional Change

Levirate marriage (also known as widow or wife inheritance) is a common marital practice in many societies around the world. According to this practice, a widow is inherited by the brother or other male relative of her deceased husband. While this practice is still observed in many societies in present-day Africa (Potash, 1986; Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, 1987), as seen in Kenya (Agot, 2007), Nigeria (Doosuur and Arome, 2013), Sudan (Stern, 2012), Uganda (Ntozi, 1997), and Zambia (Malungo, 2001), this century-old practice has recently begun to disappear. This study explores the reasons for the deterioration of this practice in sub-Saharan Africa.

This institutional change deserves considerable attention because anecdotally levirate marriage has been considered to be an informal safety net that provides material support and social protection for widows despite it being seen as treating women as "property." Therefore, it is expected that this institutional change will have significant consequences for economic development by altering both ex-ante (for currently married women) and ex-post (for current widows) welfare gains associated with widowhood. Until now, however, there has been no effort by economists to better understand the role and socioeconomic consequences of this practice despite its popularity and economic significance.

This customary practice also has much policy relevance in sub-Saharan Africa, where widows comprise a significant proportion of the population because of their husbands' deaths being attributed to typical age differences between a couple and, more recently, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. According to Potash (1986), a quarter of the adult female population is widowed in many African societies. Traditionally, a widow has limited rights to the property of both her natal and husband's families; therefore, her life is highly vulnerable. Furthermore, owing to a customary system of exogamous and patrilocal marriage, a widow's close relatives (e.g., parents,

siblings) typically live outside her current residential village and, thus, cannot easily provide her with appropriate life protection. A relatively recent empirical study conducted in northern Tanzania also found that a large increase in the murder of “witches,” typically elderly widowed women, is associated with their small contribution to a household’s earning capacity (Miguel, 2005). Despite the evident vulnerability of widows’ livelihood, however, their protection has, thus far, not been actively considered on the development agenda (compared with debates about “child” and “old-age” protection), and their lives and survival strategies are insufficiently understood (van de Walle, 2013).

To address the question, this study first develops a theoretical framework wherein levirate marriage arises as a pure strategy subgame perfect equilibrium in an extensive-form game played by two agents, i.e., a widow and her husband’s clan.¹ This model builds upon the assumption that in a patriarchal African society, great emphasis is placed on continuation of generations (e.g., Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987; Tertilt, 2005). In this game, the clan first offers livelihood support to widows in the form of levirate marriage. Widows, who otherwise have only subsistence resources, have an incentive to accept this offer although the material support is marginal. A husband’s clan responds to a widow’s strategic choice by providing her with minimal social protection to keep the children and (as caretakers) wives of the deceased within its extended family (e.g., Muller, 2005; Stern, 2012).

Following this framework, two possible mechanisms (and their combination) that result in the disappearance of levirate marriage are considered. First, female empowerment (as a source of improved women’s property rights, for example) may make this practice obsolete while potentially increasing widows’ welfare, as analyzed in the context of other marriage-related social institutions (e.g., Anderson and Bidner, 2015; Tertilt, 2006).

Second, the recent spread of HIV/AIDS might also have destroyed this practice (e.g., Malungo, 2001; Ntozi, 1997; Perry et al., 2014). If a husband’s death is attributed to AIDS, the wives may also be HIV positive. Then, by having sexual intercourse with the widows, the inheritors (and their wives and even the children born to them later) may get infected with HIV. In addition, because HIV/AIDS impairing widows’ health increases their effective child-rearing cost, a clan has to provide more livelihood support for HIV-positive widows than for seronegative ones even if such sexual intercourse is avoided. Therefore, a husband’s clan has a strong incentive to avoid this practice. In this case, widows may lose this traditional safety net. Notably, this institutional change would not increase the widows’ welfare, because a clan already squeezes utility from widows even in the presence of levirate marriage, and widows enjoy reservation utility both before and after the dissolution of levirate marriage. What is worse, since it is expected that HIV-positive widows also

¹While this theoretical framework is developed primarily in the African context, it may also apply to similar practices in other areas, such as widow remarriage in northern India (e.g., Chowdhry, 1994).

have difficulties in getting remarried, the spread of this infectious disease could decrease widows' welfare by reducing their reservation utility while simultaneously eliminating levirate marriage.

To empirically examine why levirate marriage is disappearing, this study uses one unique setting observed in a long-term household panel survey conducted in Kagera, a rural region of northwest Tanzania (Kagera Health and Development Survey, KHDS). Group discussions with the village leaders revealed that the practice of levirate marriage had become less common in a significant proportion of the sample villages between 1991 (wave 1 of the KHDS) and 2004 (wave 5). This study exploits this setting and develops a testing strategy that allows it to address its question.

While one straightforward way to assess the mechanisms responsible for the disappearance of levirate marriage is to evaluate the probability that a widow enters into this customary marriage as a result of the spread of HIV/AIDS and/or female empowerment, this approach cannot be adopted in this study. This is because information relevant to widows' engagement in levirate marriage at the individual level is absent in the KHDS data.²

As an alternative, the above setting observed in the KHDS is used. As described above, it is theoretically predicted that widows' welfare tends to decline (resp., increase) in step with the dissolution of levirate marriage as a result of the spread of HIV/AIDS (female empowerment). Consequently, in this study, a correlation between the deterioration of levirate marriage and widows' welfare is explored to elucidate the mechanisms responsible for this institutional change, with the former discerned from the KHDS at the community level and the latter at the individual level. The theoretical model indicates that this correlation is likely to be negative (resp., positive) if a primary factor driving such institutional change is HIV/AIDS (female empowerment).

In addition, a correlation between this institutional change and parental fertility decisions is also empirically examined. As the theoretical model suggests, HIV/AIDS possibly increases fertility while destroying levirate marriage. This fertility response arises if widows' de facto property rights are established in response to the reduction of male labor force caused by HIV/AIDS, which in turn enables them to afford many children in widowhood. In Uganda (e.g., Mukiza-Gapere and Ntozi, 1995) and Zambia (e.g., Malungo, 2001), cases have increasingly been reported of property being left to widows and their children owing to HIV/AIDS and the resulting deterioration of levirate marriage.

Since the empirical goal is to identify a correlation attributed only to the theoretical mechanisms that this study focuses on, it is still required to exclude influence of any confounding factors that prevent the current investigation from estimating such a correlation. To meet this objective, this study takes a triple-difference strategy that compares relevant outcomes before (wave 1) and after (wave 5) the institutional change between villages that made the practice of levirate marriage less

²Such information is also rarely obtained (even at the community level) from standard household surveys currently in use. Collection of original panel data that records the deterioration of levirate marriage in the long term also prevents the immediate investigation of such a significant ongoing economic transition.

customary and the remaining villages. The third source of difference comes from a comparison between widows and other females for estimating consumption or that between the young and old population for the analysis of fertility. This approach allows controlling for time-varying village-level characteristics that affected the KHDS villages over time in a different manner, i.e., village-specific linear time trends.

As the empirical analysis shows, the disappearance of levirate marriage was negatively associated with young widows' consumption while having a positive correlation with young wives' fertility. In addition, based on further analyses of information pertaining to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in a KHDS community, these correlations were more pronounced in villages whereby this communicable disease increasingly exerted an unfavorable health influence during the sample periods. Moreover, HIV/AIDS decreased young widows' consumption and encouraged fertility of young wives. The last two findings are also consistent with the theoretical predictions and may be seen as the reduced-form impacts of HIV/AIDS. Thus, all these findings collectively provide support for the view that a primary factor facilitating the recent deterioration of levirate marriage in sub-Saharan Africa is HIV/AIDS. The findings of prior case studies as well as my careful field observations in rural Tanzania also support this claim. According to this study's findings, young widows may urgently need social protection that shields them from the influence of HIV/AIDS.

Does Enhancing Female Labor Force Participation Lead to Curbing Dowries?

Dowry, which is broadly defined as a transfer from the bride's parents at the time of marriage, is prevalent in South Asian countries. It is often considered as a root cause of unequal treatment of women, such as sex-selective abortion, female infanticide, and "dowry murder."³ Dowry may be related to "missing women" (e.g., Sen, 1990), a term that refers to the unnaturally high male-female ratio in South Asian countries. Pro-gender activists and non-governmental organizations initiated anti-dowry movements in the late 1970s. The stance against dowry also becomes politically important (Palriwala, 2009). Given its alleged negative consequences, dowry is prohibited or restricted by laws in South Asian countries.⁴ However, the legal ban on dowry is ineffective, because the practice remains widespread, and its monetary value seems to be inflating.

Kishwar (1988, 1989) argued that assuring women's property rights is important to discourage dowry.⁵ However, it is not clear whether providing women with property rights is effective in

³"Dowry murder" means the death of a woman caused by her husband and his relatives in connection with any demand for dowry. There is an argument that any domestic homicide tends to be claimed as "dowry murder" by the victim's side (who can thereby transfer the burden of proof to the accused's side), and thus, the term "dowry murder" may be misleading (e.g., Kishwar, 1989; Narayan, 1997; Leslie, 1998; Oldenburg, 2002; Palriwala, 2009).

⁴The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 and its amendments in India; the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980 and its amendments in Bangladesh; the Dowry and Bridal Gifts (Restriction) Act of 1976, and the Marriages (Prohibition of Wasteful Expenses) Act of 1997 in Pakistan.

⁵This view is consistent with empirical evidence that dowry plays a role in enhancing women's status for those women who do not have equal inheritance rights as their brothers (Makino, 2017).

abolishing the practice. Anderson and Bidner (2015) theoretically demonstrated that strengthening women’s formal property rights does increase dowries.⁶ Roy (2015) empirically showed that an amendment assuring female siblings’ inheritance rights equal to their brothers increased the amount of dowry that they received from their parents. However, it did not lead to equal inheritance in reality. According to Anderson and Bidner (2015), the only way to effectively abolish dowry is to increase the returns to women’s human capital. Although higher educational attainment of women itself may not discourage the dowry practice, the associated income-earning abilities of women are key to abolishing the practice. This argument is consistent with seminal work by Boserup (2007), indicating that in South Asian countries, where people often regard women as economically burdensome because they generally do not participate in the labor force and depend financially on male household members, the bride’s parents compensate the groom’s household by paying dowry.⁷

There is no consensus on whether income-earning women curb dowry, however, and many mixed anecdotes exist. Some report that women’s higher education and greater income-generating opportunities have not discouraged dowry in India (e.g., Philips, 2003; Srinivasan and Lee, 2004; Srinivasan, 2005). In Bangladesh, others report anecdotes that those who earn income do not need to pay dowry because they are not a financial burden on their marital household (Kabeer, 2000, pp.170–171). To the best of our knowledge, there is only one empirical study showing that women’s higher income-earning ability decreases the amount of dowry in South Asia (Mbiti, 2008).

This lack of consensus is partly due to tangled factors affecting the dowry amount. There is a consensus that a higher income-earning ability of the groom is positively evaluated in the marriage market and increases the dowry amount. This is consistent with the price model of dowries (see Becker, 1991), which suggests that the one who gains in marital life pays a price at the time of marriage. In contrast, it is arguable whether the income-earning ability of a bride is symmetrically evaluated as having a higher quality. In South Asian countries, where *purdah* (the practice of gender segregation and the seclusion of women in public) is prevalent, female labor force participation is often associated with poverty and is stigmatized (see, for example, Kabeer, 2000; Salway et al., 2003; Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004; Kodoth, 2008). Female labor force participation due to financial necessity may not be seen favorably in the marriage market. If so, an income-earning bride may be assessed as having lower or no higher quality at best,⁸ thus not necessarily discouraging dowry.

⁶Anderson and Bidner (2015) separate dowries into the groom-price portion and the bequest portion. The former indicates a transfer to the groom and his family, and the latter indicates a transfer to the bride. They argue that assuring women’s property rights increases the groom-price portion of dowries.

⁷The relationship between women’s income-earning ability or financial independence and their bargaining in the household (e.g., Duffo, 2012) may be related. When women become financially independent, they may have more decision-making power in the household (Zohir, 1996, p.125) receive less abuse from their husbands (Aizer, 2010), delay marriage, and reduce the number of children they give birth to (Jense, 2012; Heath and Mobarak, 2015).

⁸During our field visits in Pakistan, some girls told us that no man would like to marry a woman working in a factory.

A negative association between female labor force participation and dowry amounts can be observed, even though income-earning women are not positively evaluated in the marriage market. Because working women are more likely to be observed in worse-off families in South Asia, the negative association simply may reflect the household's low relative wealth level (the wealth effect). Alternatively, but not exclusively, because arranged positive assortative matching is the norm in South Asian marriages (Banerjee et al., 2013), a lower-quality bride matched with a lower-quality groom does not need a high dowry if the quality of grooms, rather than the relatively homogeneous quality of brides, determines the dowry amount (Anderson, 2003; Anderson, 2007). If women working outside the home for wages are stigmatized, as is alleged, these women, who will be matched to lower-quality grooms, will not have to pay a high dowry. A lower dowry for income-earning women is also consistent with the bequest model of dowry, which argues that the bride's parents pay dowry as a pre-mortem bequest by disinheriting their daughters (e.g., Tambiah, 1973; Botticini and Siow, 2003). According to the bequest model, a worse-off family or a family with many children, especially one with many girls, offers a low dowry. Given these various and tangled factors associated with the dowry amount, whether or not female labor force participation leads to curbing dowries is an open question. The objective of this study is to empirically answer this question by investigating which factors, positive evaluation, assortative matching at lower quality, or the wealth effect, is most likely to explain the negative association between female labor force participation and dowries.

This lack of consensus is also partly due to data unavailability and inadequacy.⁹ Because dowry is banned in India and Bangladesh, people are usually unwilling to reveal the correct amount and the recipients of a dowry to outsiders. Even though dowry is not legally prohibited in Pakistan, and people do not hesitate in answering questions about dowry, recall errors are very common. It is hard to remember precisely the amount of dowry at the time of marriage, because a dowry usually consists of cash, gold, jewelry, furniture, electronics, kitchen items, and other items. This study adds to the limited number of empirical studies on the determinants of dowry by overcoming the problem of data unavailability and inadequacy. We conducted a unique survey targeting poor households in rural Pakistan where dowry is not prohibited, freeing people to answer questions about dowries. We asked about both the expected amount of dowry for unmarried daughters and the amount of dowry paid earlier at the time of marriage (for those already married). By using the expected amount of dowry as a main outcome variable, this study is free from recall errors. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study gathering contemporaneous information about expected dowries for unmarried women still residing with their parents. In obtaining informa-

⁹Empirical studies suggest individual or household-specific determinants of dowry, other than women's income-earning ability (Behrman et al., 1995; Behrman et al., 1999), but clear-cut evidence is scarce for the same reason. Among studies using data outside South Asia, Francis (2011) shows that sex ratio is a demographic determinant of dowry.

tion on retrospective amounts, we took careful measures to alleviate recall errors by asking the community-based dowry for each household,¹⁰ double-checking its real value, and confirming it with informants who actually attended the wedding ceremony. Furthermore, our unique survey collected information about other marriage expenses in an effort to disentangle factors associated with the dowry amounts as well as information to be used as instrumental variables (IVs) in determining female labor force participation.

Our empirical analysis shows that female labor force participation significantly decreases the dowry amount. This negative association is not significantly observed with other marriage expenses, such as bride price and ceremony expenses, which counter the negative wealth effect or assortative matching at low quality as critical factors that explain the negative association between female labor force participation and dowries. Being a female teacher, who are respected in society (e.g., Boserup, 2007), also seems to be negatively associated with dowry. Female teachers are likely to be matched with higher-quality grooms, but the matching effect is not strong enough to eliminate the negative association between female labor force participation and dowries. Positive evaluation of an income-earning bride is a stronger determinant of dowry amounts than is assortative matching. Thus, female labor force participation seems to discourage dowry overall. To abolish dowries, generating new, income-earning opportunities for women in poor households, such as those in the garment industry, seems more effective than a legal ban on dowries.

¹⁰The community-based dowry is obtained by asking each household the dowry amount paid by the community that consists of families sharing the same status and standard of living with the respondent household.

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