

## Couples in South Asia struggle to gain economic independence from in-laws

October 2 2018

---



Pano (mother-in-law) and Anjana (daughter-in-law) /Local market in Janakpur, rural Nepal Credit: UCL

Intergenerational power relations may be just as important as male-female power relations for women's economic empowerment, according to new UCL research.

The study, published in *World Development*, was conducted in rural Nepal where mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law often have fraught relationships, as their survival and well-being depend on gaining favour with male family members.

Funding was provided from UCL's Grand Challenges programme of cross-disciplinary research bringing together researchers from UCL's Institute of Global Health, Anthropology and Economics departments.

The research team uncovered multiple ways in which young wives and husbands living with their in-laws became secret allies in seeking economic independence from the rule of the mother-in-law. Most prominently, this included secretly saving up for setting up their own separate household, far away from the home of the in-laws.

Dr. Lu Gram (UCL Institute of Global Health) said: "Over the past 30 years, economic models of family behaviour have overwhelmingly focused on spousal conflict in nuclear households. Our research points to the need to consider intergenerational conflict in extended households to ensure policies to 'empower' women remain relevant to local South Asian contexts."

We are currently conducting a follow-up study on developing better measures of women's access to cash for the South Asian context."

Traditionally, young wives living with their in-laws had to accept subservience to their husband and mother-in-law. In exchange, they would receive economic security and eventually become mothers-in-law themselves with authority over their own daughter-in-law. This research

suggests the balance of power can suddenly shift with important consequences for women's fertility, health and child care practices.

The authors hope their work will be of interest to economists and policy-makers as it has shown there are intergenerational power struggles in families that are often overlooked.

**More information:** Lu Gram et al. Revisiting the patriarchal bargain: The intergenerational power dynamics of household money management in rural Nepal, *World Development* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.08.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.08.002)

Provided by University College London

Citation: Couples in South Asia struggle to gain economic independence from in-laws (2018, October 2) retrieved 28 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-10-couples-south-asia-struggle-gain.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.