

In Ethiopia, mother's wealth more protective against child marriage than father's

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For a girl in Ethiopia, her mother's wealth can protect her from becoming a child bride—but if a father prefers child marriage, his own wealth may increase the likelihood that she will be married before 18,

according to a Rutgers University-New Brunswick study.

Published in the journal *World Development*, the study found that girls whose mothers have more asset holdings—a cellphone, bicycle, sewing machine, jewelry or other valuables—have a reduced rate of entering into a [child marriage](#), while the rate is higher for girls whose [fathers](#) have more asset holdings.

"Child marriage is concerning from a [human rights](#), health and economic perspective," said the study's author Felix Muchomba, assistant professor at the Rutgers School of Social Work. "Girls married before age 18 are more likely to drop out of school early, become poor, acquire sexually transmitted infections, experience [domestic violence](#), teenage childbirth and accompanying childbirth complications, including low birth weight babies or death."

In Ethiopia, where the study was conducted, about a quarter of girls are married by age 15 and more than half are married by 18. The researchers found that the median age of marriage for girls whose mothers were in the bottom 25 percent in terms of asset holdings was 16.6 years—1.2 years lower than girls whose mothers were in the top 25 percent.

The findings indicate that mothers may be less likely to prefer child marriage for their daughters, and more acutely aware of their daughters' opposition to child marriage—and that wealthier mothers are in a better position to protect their daughters by leveraging their increased bargaining power.

The study noted that fathers may prefer child marriage because of gender norms that assign them the responsibility of arranging marriages. Fathers may also be more aware that a daughter's marriage prospects would be ruined if her reputation of sexual purity was tarnished or if she

got older, which pressures fathers to marry daughters off early.

The findings are significant, Muchomba says, because they can help in international efforts—such as improving women's economic positions—to prevent child marriage. Child [marriage](#), he says, determines whether a girl will be able to finish [high school](#) and whether she will be a child when she starts having children.

"It is estimated that, globally, 14 million [girls](#) are married before age 18 each year," said Muchomba. "The United Nations Children's Fund has warned that the number of new [child](#) brides each year is projected to continue increasing and, in some parts of the world, the number of women married as children is expected to double by 2050 because of the persistence of the practice and population growth."

More information: Felix M. Muchomba, Parents' assets and child marriage: Are mother's assets more protective than father's assets?, *World Development* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105226](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105226)

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