

“I Bought You, I Own You!” Bridewealth and Women’s Autonomy in Ghana

Kamil Fuseini
Regional Institute for Population Studies
University of Ghana, Legon
E-Mail: fuseinikamil@yahoo.com/fuseinikamil@gmail.com
Tel: +233- 24 3306553

Francis N. A. Dodoo
Regional Institute for Population Studies
University of Ghana, Legon
E-Mail: fdodoo@pop.psu.edu/fdodoo@ug.edu.gh
Tel: +233-302-500274

ABSTRACT

Does bridewealth affect women's autonomy in the areas of fertility and their personal businesses differently? This study provides answers to the interrelationships between bridewealth status, women's behaviour and women's autonomy. The "vignette experiment" method was used to measure women's autonomy and then test whether their bridewealth status (none, partial and full payments) affects their behaviour in the areas of fertility and business differently. It also sought to discover whether increases in the proportion of bridewealth paid make norms constraining women more restrictive and whether women have more autonomy in the domain of their personal business than in the domain of fertility. General linear models and multiple linear regression results showed that bridewealth status and women's behaviour affects women's autonomy. However, the results were inconsistent with the argument that the outcome effect of bridewealth on a woman's autonomy is different for fertility and a woman's personal life.

Keywords: Bridewealth, Fertility, Women's behaviour, Women's Autonomy, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a universal institution that pervades every known society with customs that differ among societies and across cultures. In Africa, marriage payments are very important in the marriage process unlike in some parts of the western world (Mwamwenda and Monyooe, 1998; Wojcicki et al., 2010). These payments can take different forms from bride-service to bridewealth, to dowry among others. Bridewealth is the most common form of marriage payment across Africa (Radcliff-Brown, 1950: 46). Bridewealth refers to the property or wealth the bridegroom's family transfers to his bride's relatives at the inception of the marriage (Goody and Tambiah, 1973; Mizinga, 2000). Bridewealth in some cultures can either be fully paid before marriage or sometimes in some societies the goods may be transferred by instalment over a period of time because of the "substantial" amount of goods that are to be transferred as bridewealth (Meekers, 1992).

Contrary to marriage ceremonies in Western societies as discrete events, in Africa, marriage is a process with each stage characterized by the performance of prescribed rites (Meekers, 1992; Mwamwenda and Monyooe, 1998). Payment of bridewealth secures rights over the woman to the man and his family with respect to her household labour, sexual and reproductive rights (Goody and Tambiah, 1973). In some cases, it also gives men rights to the children as seen in some patrilineal cultures in Ghana (Dodoo, 1998; Nukunya, 1999).

The rights secured by husbands as a result of bridewealth payment, has implications for women's autonomy which is crucial to various aspects of their lives including family/child spacing and matters related to their health. Women's autonomy is a multi-faceted entity, which refers to different aspects of women's lives (e.g. fertility and women's personal life). Dyson and Moore (1983: 45) defined autonomy as 'the capacity to manipulate one's personal environment and the ability – technical, social and psychological - to obtain information and to use it as the basis for making decisions about one's private concerns and those of one's intimates'.

The norms associated with marriage payments are very complex and vary largely across cultures (Bishai, et al., 2009). These norms govern issues such as; when the marriage payment is to be made and to whom, how the marriage payment is to be used and gender power relations between the couple, which transcends individuals (Bawah et al., 1999; Maitra, 2007). Women's autonomy has widely been accepted as a major factor that contributes to better demographic outcomes such as low fertility, low child mortality and better health status, among others (National

Family Health Survey II, 2005) but the payment of bridewealth may undermine women's decision making power with regards to these demographic outcomes among others.

Although gender inequality remains a feature of virtually every society, sub-Saharan Africa possesses some of the most evident and persistent forms of gender disadvantages than any other region in the world. The United Nations Development Programme's gender-related development index, which compares gender differences in educational attainment, mortality, and earned income shows that sub-Saharan African countries represent 32 of the 33 most gender-unequal countries in the world (Watkins, 2005 cited in Frost and Dodoo, 2010). Addressing these inequalities and their subsequent problems are critical for human development on the continent, but empirical evidence suggests that perhaps the most persistent forms of gender disadvantage in sub-Saharan Africa are not actually captured by these public-sphere measurements. Instead, gender inequality in sub-Saharan Africa may manifest most insidiously within marriage and may be reinforced by the marriage process itself, particularly bridewealth payment (DeRose & Dodoo, 2006; Dodoo & Beisel, 2005 cited in Frost and Dodoo, 2010).

Power imbalances among couples transpire as a result of the power culturally bestowed onto men (and their families) and reinforced by customs such as the payment of bridewealth (Dodoo 1998; Frost and Dodoo, 2010). This undermines women's autonomy relative to men (Ghuman et al., 2002), which is usually abused by men (Bishai, et al., 2009; Wojcicki et al., 2010; Frost and Dodoo, 2010). It alters the gender dynamics in marital relationships limiting women's independence, perpetrating unequal gender power relations and altering child bearing negotiations in marriage (Bawah et al., 1999; Kaye et al., 2005).

Despite mounting evidence that bridewealth payment bestows onto men authority over women's sexual and reproductive capacities, little attempt has been made to causally link bridewealth payment to women's autonomy as well as investigate bridewealth payment and women's autonomy beyond the childbearing spheres - sex and reproduction (Frost and Dodoo, 2010). This study therefore seeks to evaluate the theoretical prediction that bridewealth denies women their autonomy over their reproductive capacities and also explores the effect of bridewealth payment beyond the child bearing sphere to women's personal business.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Bridewealth, or the payment of money and valuable items from the groom to the bride and/or her family, remains a common custom in many societies in Africa. The way bridewealth is practiced ranges from a mainly ritualistic transfer of tokens of esteem to an outright “purchase” in which the man reserves the right to ask for a refund from the woman’s parents if he backs a claim that her behaviour is unsatisfactory (Bishai et al., 2009).

Although there is growing acknowledgment of men’s authority over childbearing in marriage, little attention has been paid to whether the marriage process also influences male authority in other spheres of a woman’s life. Nearly 50 years ago Meyer Fortes (1962) argued that bridewealth payments give husbands in sub-Saharan Africa jurisdiction over women’s household labour, as well as their sexual and reproductive capacities (Goody and Tambiah, 1973; Bawah et. al., 1999; Nukunya, 1999; Chireshe and Chireshe, 2010; Frost and Dodoo, 2010). This argument has been consistent over the years, but little empirical research has examined the validity of that thesis (Frost and Dodoo, 2010). Based on these findings it makes sense to argue that bridewealth affects women’s behaviours related to fertility differently from her other behaviours. Thus this paper hypothesises that: I - *Bridewealth status and woman’s behaviour will have an interaction effect on a woman’s autonomy.*

The African fertility and childbearing literature argues that men garner power over women’s household and reproductive capacities through the exchange of bridewealth. A wife’s preference for stopping child bearing does not translate into increased contraceptive use when the husband still wants more children. This demonstrates the dominance or the importance of men in reproduction (Dodoo, 1998; Dodoo, 1999). Bridewealth payment aside giving men authority over childbearing and women’s household labour also gives men broader control over their wives and obligates women to obey their husbands. Bridewealth payments give men greater authority over their behaviours, outside of childbearing and housework (Kaye et al., 2005; Frost and Dodoo, 2010). The fact that African societies are generally pro-natal and the payment of bridewealth is also related to child bearing reinstates fertility or reproduction as the most important function of bridewealth payment (Bawah et al., 1999; Dodoo, 1999). The fact that bridewealth payment undermines women’s autonomy in the areas of fertility presupposes that women are more likely to be autonomous in the domain of other behaviours than in the areas of fertility. Thus this paper

argues that: II - *Women have more autonomy in the domain of their personal business (personal) than in the domain of fertility.*

The payment of bridewealth secures authority over decisions concerning women’s household labour and obligates them to bear children, which is at the crux of marriages in traditional sub-Saharan African countries (Goody and Tambiah, 1973; Frost and Dodoo, 2010). In most patrilineal societies, bridewealth also gives men the right to the children (Nukunya, 1999). On the other hand in some cultures when bridewealth has not been paid or has been partially paid, the bride and/or her family can claim the right to the children (Dodoo, 1998). Bridewealth, partially or fully paid to some extent gives husbands jurisdiction over women’s household labour, as well as their sexual and reproductive capacities, denying women their autonomy over critical decisions concerning their lives (Meyer Fortes, 1962 Cited in Frost and Dodoo, 2010; Goody and Tambiah, 1973; Meekers, 1992; Bawah et al., 1999; Nukunya, 1999; Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001; Kaye et al., 2005; Frost and Dodoo, 2010). This argument suggests that as bridewealth moves from no payment to partial payment to full payment women lose their autonomy accordingly. Thus this paper hypothesises that: III - *As the proportion of bridewealth that has been paid increases, norms constraining women become more restrictive.*

AN EXPERIMENTAL TEST

The three hypotheses were tested using “vignette experimental” methods. Vignettes are simple descriptions that sketch hypothetical situations representing real-life problems, in this case a theoretical predictions of the relationship between bridewealth, woman’s behaviour and woman’s autonomy. The experiment had a 3 × 2 between subjects design. It crossed bridewealth status (no bridewealth paid, some bridewealth paid and full bridewealth paid) and woman’s behaviour (reproduction and personal business) to get six (6) conditions which measures women’s autonomy.

Table 1.1: Different combinations of bridewealth status and woman’s behaviour

Bridewealth Status	Woman’s ‘behaviour’ is related to fertility.	Woman’s ‘behaviour’ is related to her business (personal)
No Bridewealth Paid	Condition 1	Condition 2
Some Bridewealth Paid	Condition 3	Condition 4
Full Bridewealth Paid	Condition 5	Condition 6

Subjects and Procedures

Sample Size Estimation

The issues being studied in this work has never been investigated experimentally. The study used a sample size of 46 subjects per experimental condition expected to be sufficient to detect a medium size effect (Keppel, 1991).

Sampling Procedure

The study was conducted in February 2010 in nine villages conveniently sampled (Avakpedome, Tsetsekpo, Dekpoe, Tswala, Mawoekpor, Kpedzeglo, Wute, Anfoe and New Bakpa). These villages were clustered around Adidome in the North Tongu District in the Volta region of Ghana and all the communities were patrilineal societies. With forty six (46) subjects per condition a total of two hundred and seven six (276) subjects were randomly selected and interviewed. Eligible participants were women aged 18 years and above. Participants were randomly selected. In each village, the centre of the village was located and the geographic north identified. The six interviewers randomly selected from sixteen cardinal point directions and moved along that direction. Each interviewer interviewed women in the houses along the direction she selected.

Overview of the Experiment

Experimental Manipulation

There were 12 packets (questionnaires) in total with different combinations of two “vignette experiments” of which this study analysed one. The packets were pre-randomly stacked before given to the interviewer who upon encountering a woman 18 years and above, the packet at the top was administered to her. This ensured that the packets were randomly assigned to respondents. One of the 12 packets randomly assigned to the participant is read to her followed by questions about the vignette. Respondents were not informed about the experimental condition of the other vignettes. They were also asked questions about their demographic, socio-economic as well as those of their partners. The manipulation of the experiment is in Figure 1.2. The bolded and capitals sentences show the variables that were being manipulated (experimental variables) to measure norms surrounding bridewealth, woman’s behaviour and woman’s autonomy.

Dependent Measure

To measure a woman's autonomy, subjects were asked about their perceptions on the experimental conditions. The subjects were asked what they think about the vignette (experimental condition) read to them. For each question, participants were asked to score the woman in the vignettes' behaviour of either using contraception (fertility) or giving her earnings from her shop to a friend without telling her husband (personal business) by a certain level of bridewealth payment. The scoring was done using a ladder which was scaled from 1 (the woman in the vignettes' behaviour was very wrong) to 10 (the woman in the vignettes' behaviour was very right).

Figure 1.2: Vignette

VIGNETTE
I am going to tell you a story about a man and a woman. I will tell it to you twice. Please listen carefully, because after I tell you the beginning of the story I am going to ask you some questions about it.
For three years, the man and the woman have been LIVING TOGETHER. [THE MAN HAS PAID NO BRIDEWEALTH/THE MAN HAS PAID SOME OF THE BRIDEWEALTH/THEY ARE MARRIED WITH FULL BRIDEWEALTH PAID].
They have no children.
The man works in a Governmental institution.
The woman has a big store selling cloths in the market that she started with her own money.
One day the man found out that the woman had [BEEN USING CONTRACEPTION WITHOUT TELLING HIM/BEEN GIVING MOST OF HER EARNINGS FROM HER SHOP TO AN OLD FEMALE FREIND FORM HIGH SCHOOL IN THE NEXT VILLAGE WITHOUT TELLING HIM].

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in nine villages on the same level (hierarchy) on the district assembly's ranking, but there could be other implicit characteristics of the villages that could not be controlled for by design. Six interviewers were used for the data collection. Despite the fact that interviewers were given specific instructions on how to conduct interviews. Ongoing interactions between

interviewers and respondents could turn out to vary from one interviewer to the other. These two situations have the tendency of introducing bias into the data.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the mean autonomy values across the experimental conditions. A comparison of the mean perceptions of a woman's autonomy across fertility and personal business suggest that, a woman is relatively more autonomous in the domain of her personal business than in the domain of fertility (e.g., No bridewealth paid: fertility 4.39 and personal 5.33). The mean perceptions of a woman's autonomy of the conditions pertaining to a woman's personal business are higher than the mean perceptions for the conditions related to fertility. This indicates that women have more autonomy in the domain of their personal business than in the domain of reproduction, thus they vary as predicted in Hypothesis II.

A comparison of the mean perceptions of autonomy across bridewealth status related to either fertility or personal business suggest that, subjects perceived a woman whose bridewealth has not been paid (mean score: fertility 4.39 and personal 5.33) to be more autonomous than a woman whose bridewealth has been partially paid (mean score: fertility 2.20 and personal 4.28) and she is also more autonomous than a woman whose bridewealth has been fully paid (mean score: fertility 2.02 and personal 3.67). The results indicate that as the proportion of bridewealth that has been paid increases, norms constraining women's autonomy become more restrictive, hence they vary as predicted in Hypothesis III. These variations also show that participants did not simply act to their states but also responded to the experimental conditions.

Table 2: Mean Perceptions of a Woman's Autonomy across Conditions

Bridewealth Status	Fertility		Personal Business	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Subjects perceptions				
No Bridewealth Paid	4.39	3.792	5.33	3.615
Some Bridewealth Paid	2.20	2.315	4.28	3.462
Full Bridewealth Paid	2.02	1.626	3.67	3.327
Field work, 2011			N= 46 in each condition	

The Effect of Bridewealth and Woman's Behaviour on a Woman's Autonomy

Because there are two different explanatory variables in the model, the effect on the outcome of a change in one explanatory variable may either depend on the level of the other explanatory variable (interaction model) or not (additive model). To test the hypothesis that the outcome effect

of bridewealth on a woman's behaviours (fertility and personal business) is different, an interaction model was first performed.

Table 3 shows that the interaction effect between bridewealth status and woman's behaviour is not statistically significant. The results indicate that there is no evidence to reject the additive model so the interaction model is rejected. Thus, the conclusion is that the effect of bridewealth on the outcome (woman's autonomy) is the same for both of the woman's behaviours, which means that the effect of bridewealth on fertility is the same as the effect on her personal behaviour which does not support Hypothesis I.

Table 3: The effect of bridewealth status and woman's behaviour on a woman's autonomy

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	392.192	5	78.438	8.044	0.000
Bridewealth Status	209.138	2	104.569	10.724	0.000
Woman's Behaviour	167.482	1	167.482	17.176	0.000
BW Status * Wom. Beh.	15.572	2	7.786	0.799	0.451
Error	2632.717	270	9.751		
Corrected Total	3024.909	275			

Field work, 2011 R Squared = 0.130 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.114)

It is therefore appropriate to re-run the model as an additive model to examine the main effect of bridewealth status and woman's behaviour on a woman's autonomy. Table 4 shows the main effects of bridewealth and woman's behaviour on the outcome variable (woman's autonomy). Both bridewealth status and woman's behaviour had significant effects on woman's autonomy and that at least one level of bridewealth status and woman's behaviour is significantly different.

Table 4: The effect of bridewealth status and woman's behaviour on a woman's autonomy

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	376.620	3	125.540	12.894	0.000
Bridewealth Status	209.138	2	104.569	10.740	0.000
Woman's Behaviour	167.482	1	167.482	17.202	0.000
Error	2648.290	272	9.736		
Corrected Total	3024.909	275			

Field work, 2011 R Squared = 0.125 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.115)

To be able to determine which level(s) of bridewealth status are significantly different a post hoc analysis was performed, specifically a Tukey HSD test (Table 5). The test shows that, there is a significant difference between no bridewealth paid and some bridewealth. This suggests that, when

some bridewealth is paid a woman loses her autonomy (by about 1.62 points) compared to a woman whose bridewealth has not been paid. A woman whose bridewealth has been fully paid significantly lost their autonomy (by about 2.01 points). This shows that there is statistically significant evidence that different levels of bridewealth influence a woman's autonomy differently (Table 5).

Table 5: Multiple comparison analysis - Tukey HSD

BW Status (I)	BW Status (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
No Bridewealth Paid	Some Bridewealth Paid	1.62*	0.460	0.001	0.54	2.70
	Full Bridewealth Paid	2.01*	0.460	0.000	.93	3.10
Some Bridewealth Paid	No Bridewealth Paid	-1.62*	0.460	0.001	-2.70	-0.54
	Full Bridewealth Paid	0.39	0.460	0.672	-0.69	1.48
Full Bridewealth Paid	No Bridewealth Paid	-2.01*	0.460	0.000	-3.10	-0.93
	Some Bridewealth Paid	-0.39	0.460	0.672	-1.48	0.69

Field work, 2011

Since post hoc analysis can't be performed for variables with two categories, the estimated means for a woman's behaviour is used to see which of the categories are different. The mean for a woman's personal life (mean 4.43) is higher than fertility (mean 2.87). This goes to support the results observed in the women's mean perception about a woman's autonomy which indicates that a woman is more autonomous in the domain of her personal life than fertility (Table 6).

Table 6: Estimated means for bridewealth and woman's behaviour

Bridewealth Status	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
No Bridewealth Paid	4.859	0.326	4.218	5.500
Some Bridewealth Paid	3.239	0.326	2.598	3.880
Full Bridewealth Paid	2.848	0.326	2.207	3.489
Woman's Behaviour				
Fertility	2.870	0.266	2.346	3.393
Personal	4.428	0.266	3.904	4.951

Field work, 2011

Experimental and Non-Experimental Determinants of Women's Autonomy

The experimental and non-experimental predictors of a woman's autonomy are examined with two multiple linear regression models. Model 1 on Table 7 shows the results of the relationship between the experimental variables (bridewealth status and woman's behaviour) and a woman's autonomy. Model 2 on Table 7 shows the relationship between the experimental variables, the background variables and a woman's autonomy. In this work, participants' background characteristics (non-experimental variables) are used as proxies for the woman in the vignette to determine other variables (aside bridewealth status and woman's behaviour) that influence a woman's autonomy.

Model 1 and 2 on Table 7 shows that bridewealth status is significantly related to women's perception of a woman's autonomy. When some bridewealth of the woman has been paid women believed the woman's behaviour of taking decisions without telling the husband was not right (-1.11) as compared to one with no bridewealth paid. When bridewealth has been fully paid, the women believed the woman's behaviour was very wrong (-1.89) compared to the one whose bridewealth has not been paid at all. This shows that a woman whose bridewealth has been fully paid is less autonomous than a woman whose bridewealth has been partially paid and they were less autonomous than women whose bridewealth has not been paid at all. This supports the hypothesis that as the proportion of bridewealth that has been paid increases norms constraining women become more restrictive (Hypothesis III).

Women are more autonomous in the domain of their personal business than in the domain of fertility (Table 7). Fertility had a significant relationship (α level of 0.01) with women's perceptions of a woman's autonomy with a coefficient of -1.41, which indicates that, the participants perceived the woman's behaviour regarding fertility to be wrong as compared to the behaviour related to her personal business. This shows that women are less autonomous in the domain of fertility than in the domain of their personal lives. This supports the hypothesis that women have more autonomy in the domain of business than in the domain of fertility (Hypothesis II).

Age appeared to have a significant relationship with a woman's autonomy, the results on model 2 (-0.048) suggest that a unit increase in the age of the subjects makes them perceive the woman's behaviour of taking decisions autonomously, to be wrong. Among all the levels of education, only primary education was not significantly related to women's perceptions of a

woman's autonomy, but the categories showed a pattern. The results indicate that as level of education increases women's perception of a woman's autonomy gets better. Primary education showed a positive coefficient of 0.67, while middle/JHS (0.96) and secondary/SHS+ (3.95) levels of education were significantly related to women's perceptions of a woman's autonomy. This suggest that women with secondary or higher levels of education believe that the woman is right for taking decisions autonomously compared to women who had Middle/JHS education. Women with Middle/JHS education also felt the woman's behaviour was more right than women who had primary education who also believed the woman's behaviour was right compared to those with no education.

Women's experience of domestic violence at the hands of their partners or husbands was significantly related to women's perception of woman's autonomy (-1.60), showing that women who had experienced domestic violence believed the woman's behaviour was not right compared to those who had not.

Table 7: Multiple linear regression coefficients for the relationship between woman's autonomy and the independent variables

Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error
Constant	5.638***	0.376	4.336***	1.656
Bridewealth Status				
No Bridewealth paid (R)				
Some Bridewealth Paid	-1.620***	0.460	-1.114**	0.457
Full Bridewealth Paid	-2.011***	0.460	-1.886***	0.451
Woman's Behaviour				
Personal business (R)				
Fertility	-1.558***	0.376	-1.411***	0.372
Age				
Age			-0.048**	0.023
Highest Level of Education				
No Education (R)				
Primary			0.665	0.508
Middle/JHS			0.963*	0.496
Secondary/SHS+			3.954***	1.092
Religion				
Other Religions (R)				
Roman Catholic			0.471	0.929
Presbyterian			0.24	0.724
Pentecostal/Charismatic			0.198	0.638
Other Christian			0.724	0.627
No. of Children Ever Had				
No. of Children Ever Had			0.063	0.094
Current Marital Status				
Never Married (R)				
Married			1.076	1.402
Living Together			2.017	1.372
Formerly Married			2.586*	1.508
Years in Relationship				
Years in relationship			0.033	0.021
Ever been beaten				
No (R)				
Yes			-1.599***	0.485
Ever Observed Violence				
No (R)				
Yes			-0.046	0.524

R² = 0.125, Adjusted R² = 0.115

R² = 0.250, Adjusted R² = 0.194

(R) Reference Category, Std. Error - Standard Error, * Significant at α level = 0.1, ** Significant at α level = 0.05, *** Significant at α level = 0.01

Field work, 2011

N=276

Discussion and Conclusions

The experimental study shows that bridewealth does have an effect on a woman's autonomy. The findings of the experiment were inconsistent with the argument that the outcome effect of bridewealth is different for a woman's behaviour (fertility and personal business). The results indicated that the payment of bridewealth undermines women's reproductive autonomy as well as other aspects of their personal life (e.g., personal business). This is an indication that bridewealth affects every aspect of a woman's life. This is consistent with the finding of Frost and Dadoo (2010) who found that adolescents expected to have broader control over women when bridewealth is fully paid.

The results of the experiment are consistent with the argument that women have more autonomy in the domain of their personal business than in the domain of fertility. African societies are mostly pro-natal and thus place much value on child bearing than other aspects of a woman's life. This finding of the study is consistent with the finding of Bawah et al., (1999) that once bridewealth is paid the most important responsibility for a woman is to give birth.

The results are also consistent with the argument that as the proportion of bridewealth that has been paid increases, norms constraining women become more restrictive. This suggests that a woman whose bridewealth has been fully paid is less autonomous than a woman whose bridewealth has been partially paid and she is also less autonomous than a woman whose bridewealth has not been paid at all. Even though in casual relationships men usually have some level of authority, it is not as exerting as when he has paid some bridewealth. When some bridewealth has been paid the man does not have full authority over the woman until the full bridewealth is paid. This finding supports results from discussions with adolescents who stated that if bridewealth is not fully paid men don't really have authority over the woman (Frost and Dadoo, 2010).

Elderly women were more likely to be against a woman taking decisions related to issues of either fertility or her personal business without telling her husband. This could be due to the fact that young women were more exposed to information and the contemporary advocacy for women's rights than the elderly women. This is supported by the findings in India and Pakistan by Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001) that younger age groups showed a very significant negative relationship with autonomy. This is an indication that elderly women were more likely to be

against a woman taking decisions related to issues of either fertility or her personal business without telling her husband.

As the level of education increases, women's perceptions of a woman's autonomy get better. This result could be because of the level of exposure and knowledge of women with higher education. The finding is consistent with the findings of Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001) from their study on women's autonomy in India and Pakistan where they found that education was a significant determinant of autonomy. Primary education significantly influences female autonomy. Experience of domestic violence was significantly related to a woman's autonomy. Women who have ever been beaten by their partners/husbands believed the woman's behaviour was very wrong. This could be as a result of the violence the subjects themselves experienced which fits into the vignette that was read to them. For this reason they would rather think women should not take decisions autonomously to suffer the same fate.

In conclusion the experiment has demonstrated men's authority over women's lives as a result of bridewealth. This makes it difficult to begrudge men when they say to women "I bought you, I own you" when bridewealth is paid.

Lastly, the cultural norms associated with bridewealth payment, women's behaviour and women's autonomy may be an area to explore for future female empowerment research since it is quite obvious that they play an influential role in female dis-empowerment.

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