

Bride Price and the Well Being of Women

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Introduction

We study a specific cultural practice: bride price payments.


- ▶ A transfer of money and goods from the groom and the groom's family to the bride's family at marriage.
- ▶ Amounts are large, often in excess of a year's income.
- ▶ Practice is widespread throughout the world, and most common in sub-Saharan Africa and much of Asia.


Bride Price in Sub-Saharan Africa

- ▶ Often associated with the practice of patrilineal kinship
- ▶ Particularly, when marriage patrilocal - i.e. women move from their family's home to the home of the groom - bride price intended to compensate her family for the loss of her productive labor
- ▶ Without the payment of bride price, marriages often not considered legitimate

Bride Price Calculator

Highest Education	
PHd	-N50,000
Masters	+N100,000
Bachelors	+N75,000
HND	+N30,000
OND	+N15,000
SSCE	+N3,000
Primary School	+N500
At-all-at-all	-N100,000

Previous

Next

Ceremony



Why Study Bride Price?

Growing criticism of the practice of bride price:

- ▶ Transactional nature of the practice results in the commodification of women
- ▶ Husbands may feel they can mistreat their wives because they have “paid” for them
 - ▶ e.g. “I am beating my cows” (Eryenyu, 2014)
- ▶ May trap women in marriage because bride price may have to be repaid
 - ▶ As a result, Ugandan courts have outlawed that bride price be repaid upon divorce
- ▶ May incentivize early marriage of daughters if family faces income shock (Corno and Voena, 2016; Corno et al. 2016)

Why Study Bride Price?

- ▶ Little systematic evidence on harms of bride price. Primarily anecdotal
- ▶ Western interpretation of transactional nature of bride price not necessarily how viewed by those who practice it
- ▶ According to anthropologists:
 - ▶ bride price is “a compensation for the expense, the care and trouble spent on the bride’s upbringing...It is compensation for the complete loss of a worker as a bride withdraws from her own kindred and henceforth belongs to her husband’s” (Vroklage,1952, p. 135)
- ▶ Bride price is the primary indicator of marriage
 - ▶ “There was no ceremony, but traditionally I am married because I paid the bridewealth” (Mburugu, 1994)

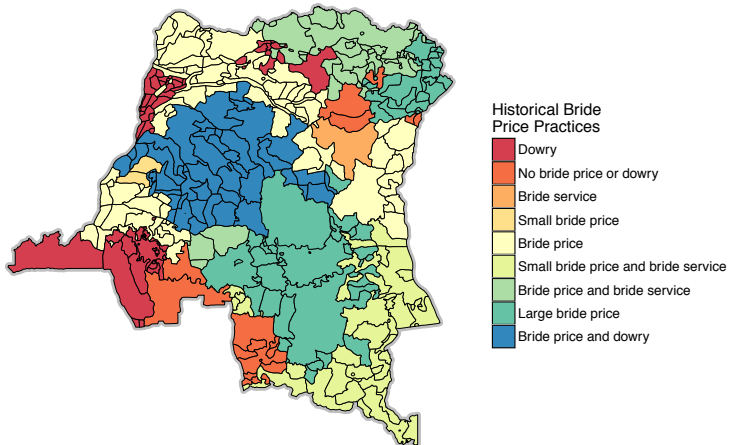
This study

Use data from 317 couples from the DRC to examine the correlation between bride price amount and:

- ▶ age of marriage and fertility
- ▶ acceptance of domestic violence
- ▶ lower “quality” marriages
- ▶ self-reported happiness

Bride Price in Congo

- ▶ Referred to as *la dot* or *biuma*
- ▶ Historically a lot of variation in marriage payment customs
- ▶ Today almost all ethnic groups practice bride price



Bride Price in Congo

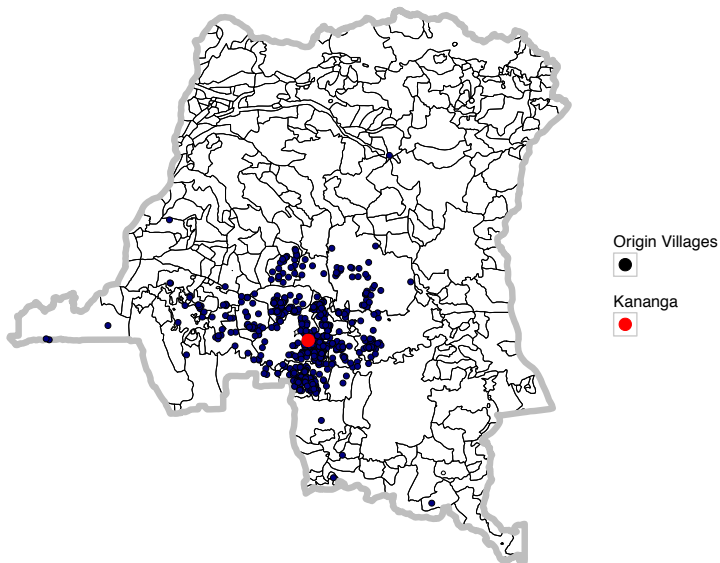
Interviews and focus groups conducted in our study region suggest that bride price still a very important practice:

- ▶ “Bride price is important for all African women, but for Congolese women in particular. . . The bride price is an official custom that expresses the love a husband has for his wife. For the parents of the wife, the bride price symbolizes a reward and an honor.”
- ▶ “The bride price is how a man honors his wife...[bride price is] a guarantee that prevents the [woman's family] from taking her back when there is a dispute”.

Data Collection

- ▶ Data collected between June and October of 2015 in Kananga, DRC, the capital of Kasai Central province
- ▶ Many different ethnic groups present in the city
- ▶ Collected data from 320 married couples
- ▶ Husbands and wives completed surveys on: demographics, economic activities, land ownership, family history, children, views on gender norms, marriage
- ▶ Part of a broader project on how the structure of kinship systems - matrilineal relative to patrilineal kinship - affects spousal cooperation

Origin Villages of Sample



Summary Statistics

	<i>Women</i>			
	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Age	36.76	13.89	18.00	91.00
Age Married	19.37	4.38	12.00	53.00
Years of Education	8.48	3.65	0.00	17.00
Num. Marriages	1.06	0.23	1.00	2.00
Born in Kananga	0.27	0.45	0.00	1.00
Num. Living Children	4.21	2.82	0.00	12.00
Observations	317			

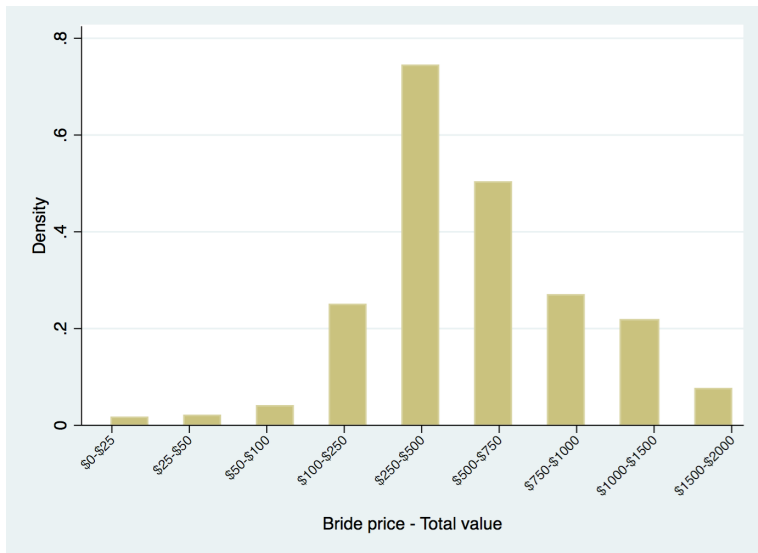
	<i>Men</i>			
	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Age	44.50	14.27	22.00	80.00
Age Married	27.02	6.51	1.00	63.00
Years of Education	11.73	4.07	0.00	18.00
Num. Marriages	1.25	0.57	1.00	5.00
Born in Kananga	0.22	0.42	0.00	1.00
Observations	317			

Notes: *Age* is the respondent's current age. *Age at Marriage* is how old the respondent was at the time of marriage. *Years Education* is the respondent's number of years of education. *Num. Marriages* is the number of times the respondent has been married. *Born in Kananga* is an indicator variable equal to one if the respondent was born in Kananga. *Num. Living Children* is the number of living children the couple has.

Measuring Bride Price Payments

- ▶ Men and women asked “At the time of your own marriage, what was the total value of the price price that was paid. Please include the cost of all the goods and cash payments given as part of the bride price.”
- ▶ Bride price can be paid in many forms: goats, money, food, other household items
- ▶ Exact dollar amount of total value of bride price payments difficult to asses, so respondents asked to choose among different price categories

Bride Price Payment Distribution



Correlates of Bride Price Amount

	<i>Dep. Var.: Bride Price Amount</i>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Wife's Age	0.011 (0.025)	-0.016 (0.037)	-0.021 (0.042)
Wife's Age Squared	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Wife's Years Education	0.091*** (0.026)	0.096*** (0.027)	0.090*** (0.027)
Year Married		-0.011 (0.013)	-0.025 (0.016)
Married in Kananga		-4.604 (25.625)	-3.637 (25.792)
Year Married*Married in Kananga		0.002 (0.013)	0.002 (0.013)
Husband's Age			0.014 (0.046)
Husband's Age Squared			-0.000 (0.000)
Husband's Years Education			0.008 (0.026)
Observations	317	317	317
Mean Dep. Var.	5.722	5.722	5.722

Correlates of Bride Price Payments

- ▶ Wife's years of education significant predictor of bride price amount
- ▶ No differences for those married in Kananga or rural areas
- ▶ No evidence of significant inflation over time

Regression Equation

$$Y_{i,h,w} = \alpha + \beta \text{Bride Price Amount}_{i,h,w} + \mathbf{X}_i\Omega + \mathbf{X}_h\Pi + \mathbf{X}_w\Gamma + \varepsilon_{i,h,w} \quad (1)$$

- ▶ i indexes marriages that comprise a husband h and a wife w .
- ▶ $Y_{i,h,w}$: outcome of interest
- ▶ $\text{Bride Price Amount}_{i,h,w}$: amount of the bride price payment received by woman w 's family.
- ▶ \mathbf{X}_h and \mathbf{X}_w : characteristics of the husband and wife, respectively: age, age squared, and educational attainment (measured in years).
- ▶ \mathbf{X}_i : marriage characteristics, including the year that the marriage occurred, if the marriage was in Kananga, and the interaction of the two.

Caveats

- ▶ Will present *correlations* between bride price payments and outcomes of interest
- ▶ This is not causal evidence - cannot say the causal effect of bride price amounts on our outcomes of interest because bride price amounts are non-random
- ▶ Thus, bride price amounts may be capturing the effects of other variables, i.e.
 - ▶ higher quality husbands pay higher bride prices
 - ▶ women with more supportive families can negotiate higher bride prices etc.

Bride Price Amount and Age at Marriage

	<i>Dep. Var.: Wife's Age at Marriage</i>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Bride Price Amount	-0.289 (0.213)	-0.177 (0.155)	-0.102 (0.141)
Wife's Age	0.185*** (0.069)	0.862*** (0.139)	1.031*** (0.145)
Wife's Age Squared	-0.002* (0.001)	-0.006*** (0.001)	-0.008*** (0.001)
Wife's Years Education	0.290*** (0.064)	0.130** (0.060)	0.129** (0.059)
Year Married		0.330*** (0.059)	0.485*** (0.064)
Married in Kananga		-109.714* (66.110)	-92.843 (64.190)
Year Married*Married in Kananga		0.055* (0.033)	0.046 (0.032)
Husband's Age			-0.389*** (0.109)
Husband's Age Squared			0.006*** (0.001)
Husband's Years Education			0.014 (0.042)
Observations	317	317	317
Mean Dep. Var.	19.37	19.37	19.37

Bride Brice Amount and Fertility

	<i>Dep. Var.: Number of Children</i>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Bride Price Amount	0.125* (0.075)	0.095 (0.067)	0.065 (0.061)
Wife's Age	0.465*** (0.028)	0.280*** (0.048)	0.178*** (0.050)
Wife's Age Squared	-0.004*** (0.000)	-0.003*** (0.001)	-0.002*** (0.000)
Wife's Years Education	-0.103*** (0.034)	-0.059* (0.032)	-0.064** (0.031)
Year Married		-0.089*** (0.020)	-0.151*** (0.020)
Married in Kananga		33.216 (35.368)	25.405 (33.628)
Year Married*Married in Kananga		-0.017 (0.018)	-0.013 (0.017)
Husband's Age			0.209*** (0.048)
Husband's Age Squared			-0.003*** (0.000)
Husband's Years Education			0.010 (0.026)
Observations	317	317	317
Mean Dep. Var.	4.208	4.208	4.208

Domestic Violence

- ▶ Measure views on domestic violence using standard set of questions taken from the Demographic and Health Surveys
- ▶ Domestic violence is justified if wife (1) goes out without husband's permission (2) neglects children (3) argues with husband (4) refuses sex (5) burns food
- ▶ All questions answered with 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 5 "Strongly Agree"
- ▶ Construct index that takes the average response to the questions

Bride Price Amount and Domestic Violence

	<i>Dep. Var.: Positive Views of Domestic Violence</i>					
	Women			Men		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Bride Price Amount	-0.153*** (0.035)	-0.163*** (0.036)	-0.172*** (0.036)	0.064 (0.050)	0.067 (0.050)	0.094* (0.050)
Wife's Age	0.006 (0.016)	-0.012 (0.022)	-0.010 (0.027)			0.019 (0.041)
Wife's Age Squared	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)			-0.000 (0.000)
Wife's Years Education	-0.011 (0.015)	-0.007 (0.015)	-0.003 (0.018)			-0.067*** (0.021)
Year Married		-0.011 (0.009)	-0.028*** (0.010)		-0.003 (0.013)	-0.004 (0.013)
Married in Kananga		-10.615 (16.524)	-12.102 (15.559)		14.792 (19.624)	15.169 (19.427)
Year Married*Married in Kananga		0.005 (0.008)	0.006 (0.008)		-0.007 (0.010)	-0.007 (0.010)
Husband's Age			0.012 (0.029)	-0.056* (0.033)	-0.061* (0.033)	-0.079* (0.043)
Husband's Age Squared			-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.001 (0.000)
Husband's Years Education			-0.012 (0.015)	-0.031* (0.017)	-0.027 (0.017)	-0.005 (0.018)
Observations	317	317	317	317	317	317
Mean Dep. Var.	2.470	2.470	2.470	2.322	2.322	2.322

Marriage Quality

- ▶ Of course, difficult to measure marriage quality
- ▶ Ask respondents how often they do various activities with a spouse
- ▶ How frequently do you and your spouse (1) laugh together (2) work on a project together (3) receive a gift (4) walk together (5) talk about your day (6) discuss your feelings
- ▶ All questions answered with 1 “Never” to 6 “More than once a day”.
- ▶ Construct index that sums the responses to each of the questions and divides by 6 to generate the average response.

Bride Price Amount and Marriage Quality

	<i>Dep. Var.: Frequency of Activities Index</i>					
	Women			Men		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Bride Price Amount	0.076** (0.031)	0.076** (0.031)	0.075** (0.032)	0.119*** (0.027)	0.119*** (0.027)	0.114*** (0.026)
Wife's Age	-0.038*** (0.014)	-0.030 (0.022)	-0.003 (0.027)			-0.038 (0.024)
Wife's Age Squared	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000** (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)			0.000* (0.000)
Wife's Years Education	0.017 (0.014)	0.015 (0.014)	0.016 (0.015)			0.011 (0.014)
Year Married		-0.002 (0.007)	-0.003 (0.009)		-0.005 (0.007)	-0.007 (0.008)
Married in Kananga		-13.715 (14.268)	-11.927 (14.382)		2.896 (11.108)	5.850 (11.469)
Year Married*Married in Kananga		0.007 (0.007)	0.006 (0.007)		-0.001 (0.006)	-0.003 (0.006)
Husband's Age			-0.043 (0.026)	-0.044*** (0.017)	-0.047*** (0.017)	-0.022 (0.022)
Husband's Age Squared			0.000 (0.000)	0.000** (0.000)	0.000** (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Husband's Years Education			-0.005 (0.012)	-0.015 (0.010)	-0.014 (0.010)	-0.015 (0.010)
Observations	315	315	315	315	315	315
Mean Dep. Var.	4.999	4.999	4.999	5.285	5.285	5.285

Happiness

- ▶ Respondents asked to rate how happy they are on a scale of (1) Very Unhappy to (5) Very Happy.

Bride Price Amount and Happiness

	<i>Dep. Var.: Happiness</i>					
	Women			Men		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Bride Price Amount	0.188*** (0.037)	0.193*** (0.038)	0.192*** (0.038)	0.025 (0.033)	0.026 (0.033)	-0.005 (0.035)
Wife's Age	-0.009 (0.019)	0.015 (0.020)	0.002 (0.025)			0.016 (0.029)
Wife's Age Squared	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)			-0.000 (0.000)
Wife's Years Education	0.050*** (0.014)	0.045*** (0.014)	0.030* (0.016)			0.074*** (0.015)
Year Married		0.007 (0.008)	0.009 (0.009)		-0.004 (0.008)	-0.009 (0.009)
Married in Kananga		-10.598 (13.584)	-6.546 (13.538)		-17.159 (15.182)	-21.441 (14.949)
Year Married*Married in Kananga		0.005 (0.007)	0.003 (0.007)		0.009 (0.008)	0.011 (0.007)
Husband's Age			0.008 (0.027)	0.026 (0.025)	0.035 (0.026)	0.027 (0.032)
Husband's Age Squared			-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Husband's Years Education			0.033** (0.014)	0.056*** (0.014)	0.055*** (0.014)	0.026* (0.014)
Observations	317	317	317	317	317	317
Mean Dep. Var.	2.681	2.681	2.681	2.700	2.700	2.700

Bride Price Repayment

- ▶ “In the event of a divorce, how much of the bride price must be repaid?”.
- ▶ Respondents choose one of the following responses: all of it; most of it; some of it; a little bit of it; none of it; or don't know.
- ▶ We then code a variable that equals 0 if none of it must be returned, 1 if some amount of it must be returned, and 2 if all of it must be returned.
- ▶ No evidence that the requirement to pay back the bride price upon divorce is associated with wives being less happy in their marriage.
- ▶ However, when the value of the bride price that was paid at marriage is very high, then a negative and significant relationship between the repayment requirement and the happiness of wives

Taking Stock

- ▶ We find that bride price amount correlated with: wife's education level, less acceptance of domestic violence, higher quality marriage, and greater happiness for women
- ▶ No evidence that bride price associated with earlier marriage or higher fertility
- ▶ Only for very high bride price payments is the requirement to repay upon divorce negatively correlated with wife's happiness
- ▶ Again - this is not causal
- ▶ Some causal evidence on education - use school expansion to examine heterogeneous effects by bride price practices (e.g. Ashraf et al., 2016)

Conclusions

- ▶ Important to try to understand how various cultural practice affect the well being of women
- ▶ We use data from 317 couples in DRC to examine correlation between bride price amounts and various outcomes for women
- ▶ Part of a broader research agenda examining the relationship between various cultural practices and social structures (such as kinship systems, age sets) and economic development