

# Child Protection and Harmful Traditional Practices: Female Early Marriage in Ethiopia

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**Research Symposium**

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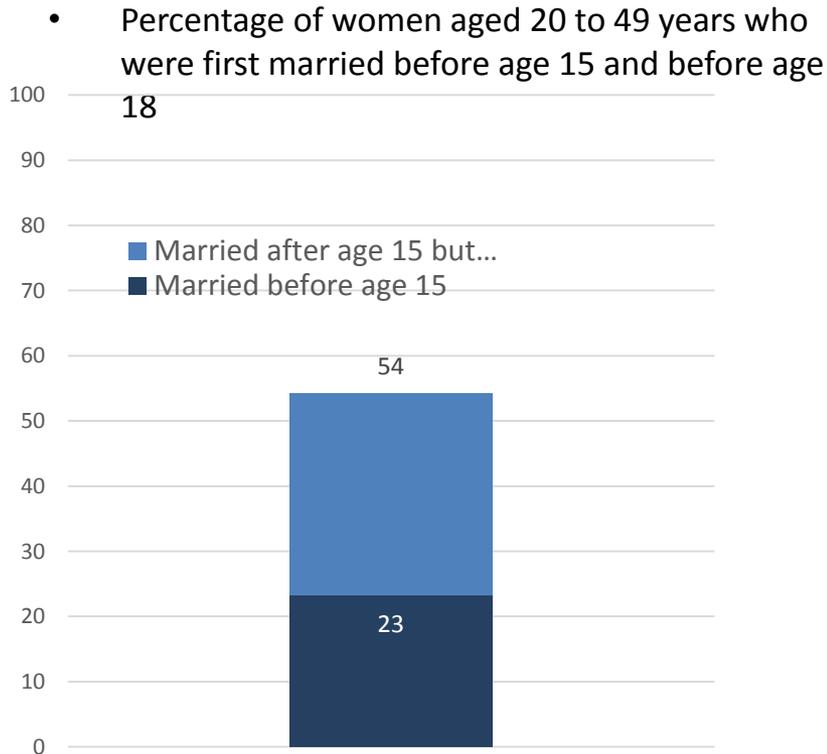
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**Lilongwe, Malawi**

# OUTLINE

1. Context
2. The Legal Context of Protection Child marriage
3. Evidence from Young Lives Study
4. Changes in Girls Early marriage
5. Discussions: Child right discourses and local Practices

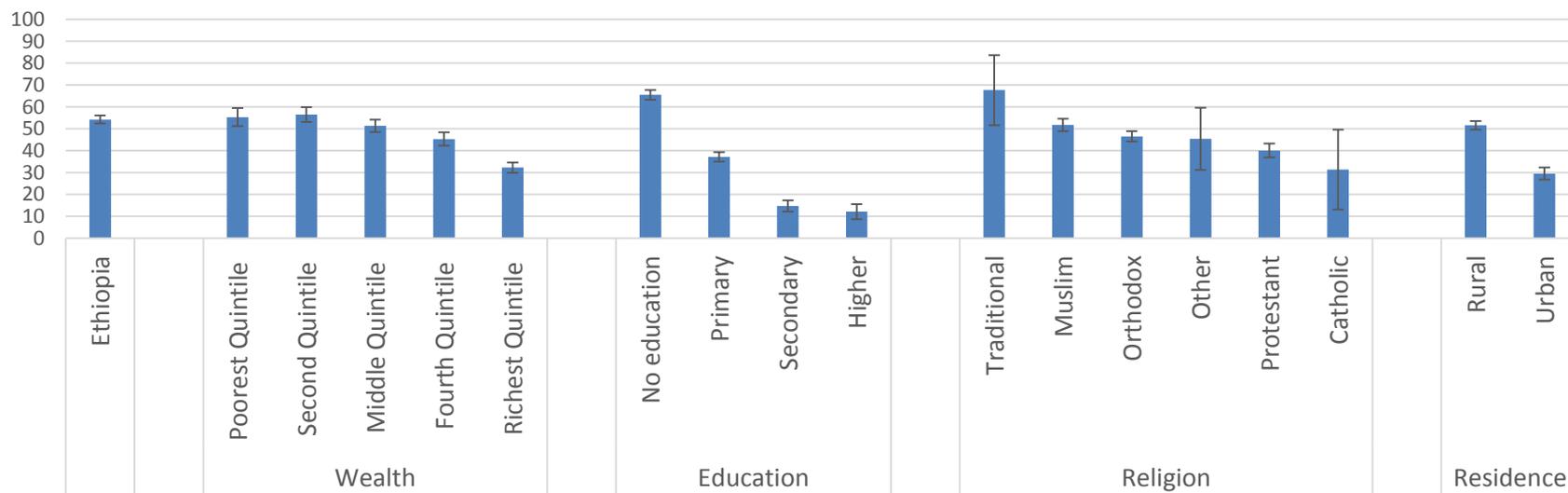
# Marriage Patterns: women before 18 and 15 (DHS 2016)



- Just **over half** of women (20 to 49 years) were married before age 18
- Nearly **one quarter** were married before age 15
- The practice appears to be declining – among young women (20 to 24 years), **40 per cent** were married before age 18
- Levels of child marriage vary dramatically across population groups

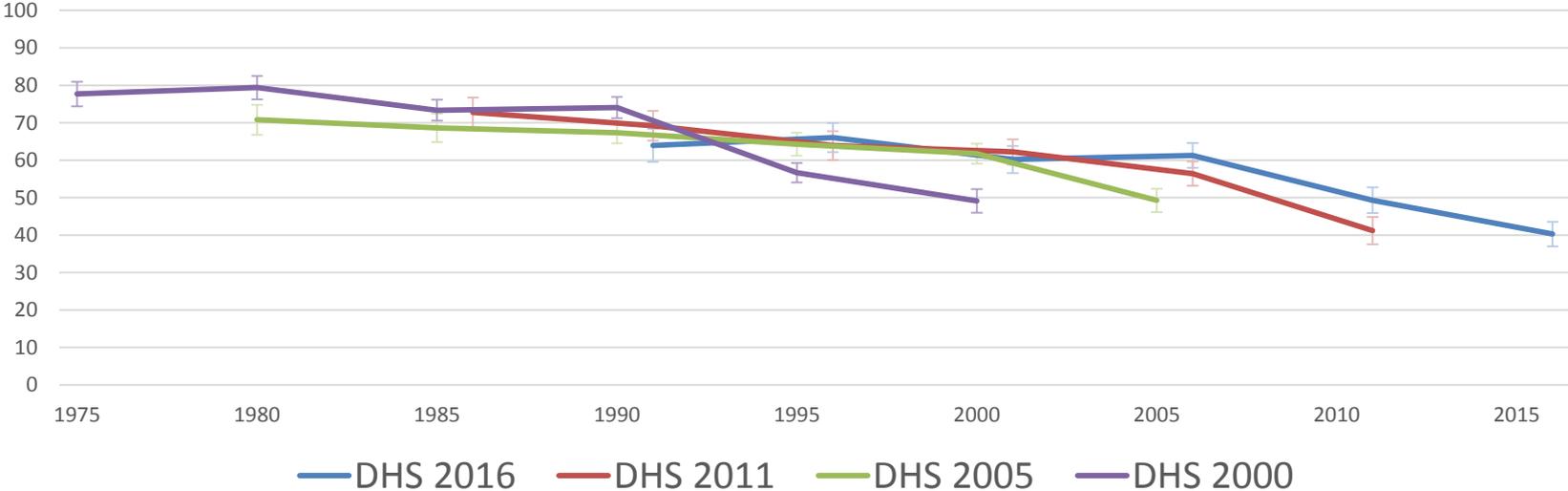
# Child marriage more common among certain groups, including poorer, less educated or living in rural areas

Percentage of women aged 20 to 49 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by selected background characteristics



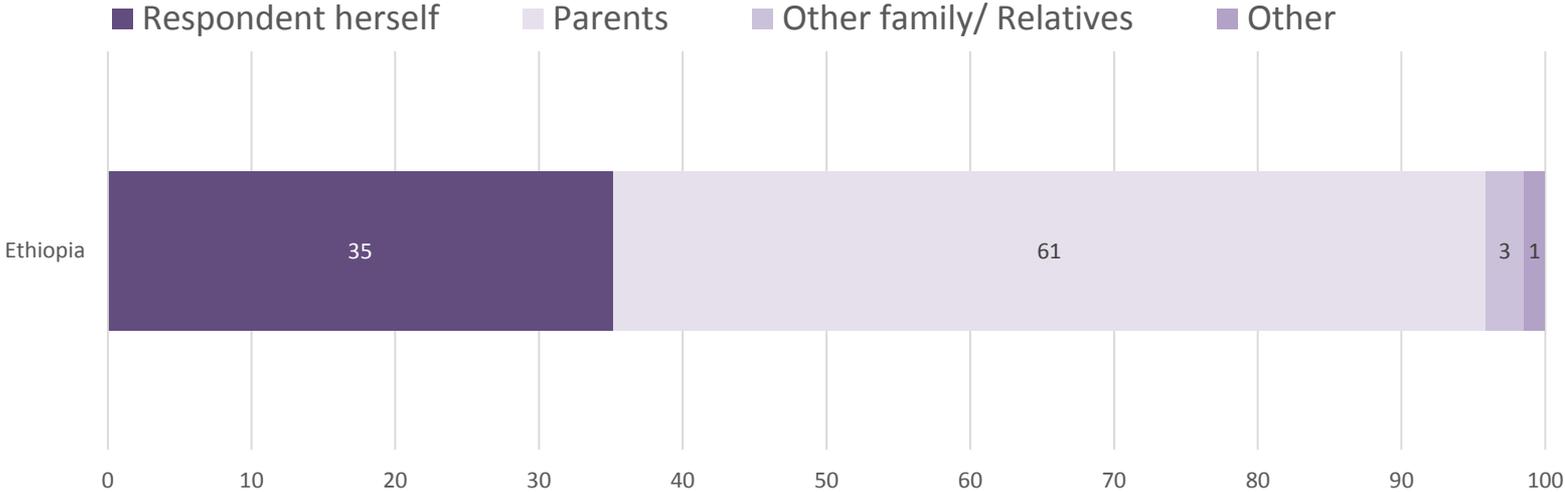
# Marriage trends: Evidence of decline in the prevalence of child marriage, particularly in the last 10 years, but a long way to go

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by survey



# Beyond age, decision-making: about one third of women reported deciding on their own first marriage (EDHS 2016)

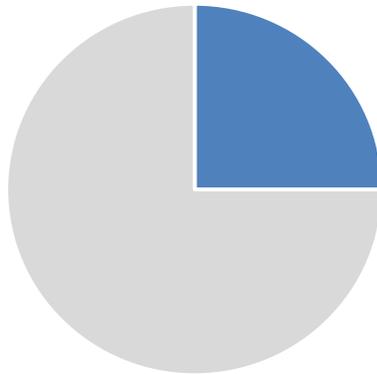
Percent ever-married women aged 15 to 49 years by decision on the woman's first marriage



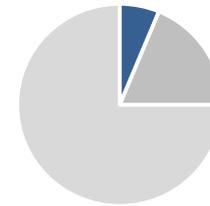
# Consequences post marriage: a quarter of women had attended school before marriage but only 6% continued after

Percentage of women 15-49 by school attendance before and after marriage

Percentage continuing school after marriage



- Attended school before marriage
- Did not attend school before marriage



- Continued attending school after marriage
- Did not continue attending school after marriage
- Did not attend school before marriage

(YL 22 year olds 22% studying but only 6% of married & 2% studying and working)

# Legal Protection of early marriage

## 1995 **Constitution**

- prohibits HTPs to women

## 1997 Federal **Cultural Policy**

- HTPs abolish step by step

## 2000 Revised **Family Proclamation**

- prohibits <18 marriage

## 2005 **Criminal Code**

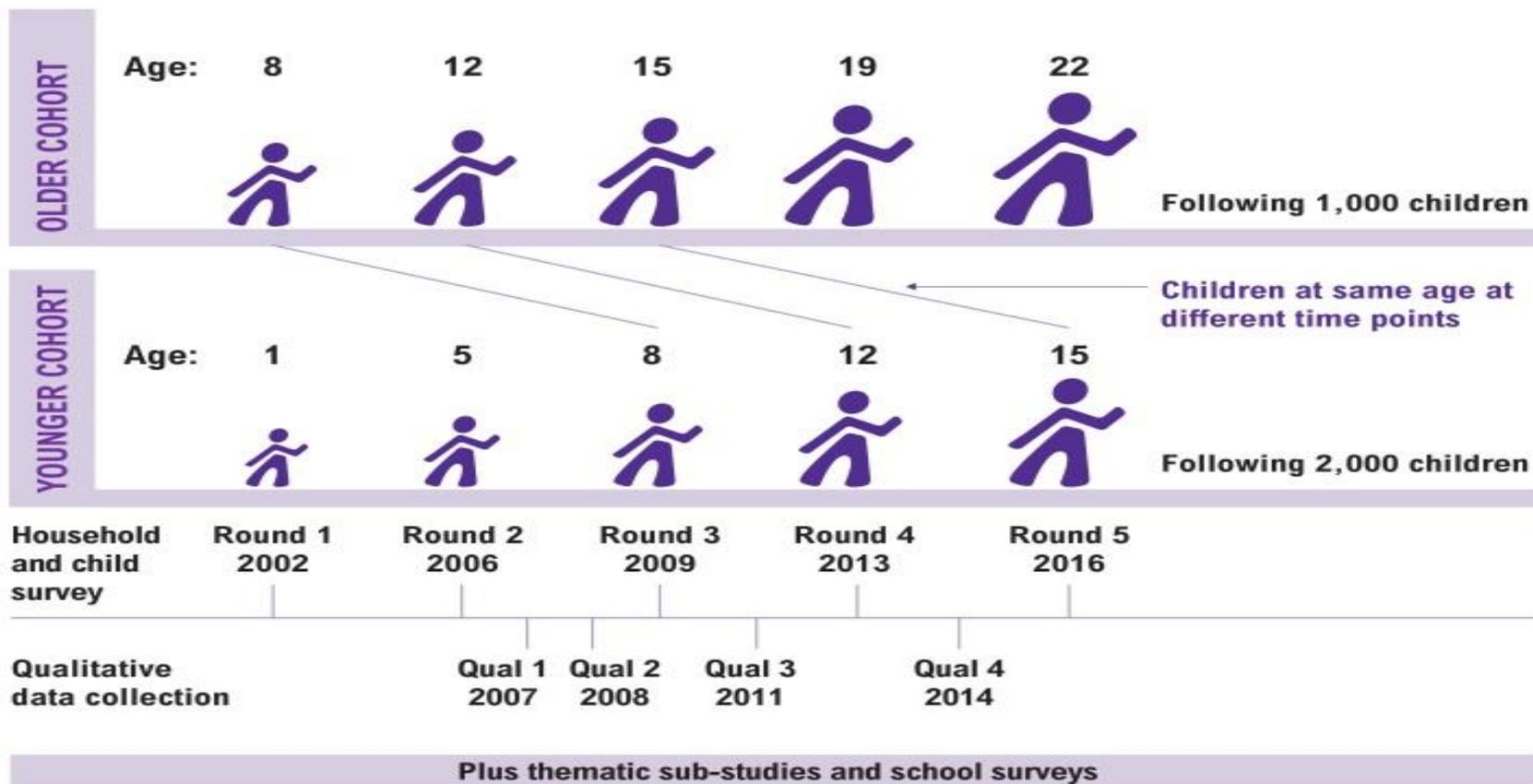
- 3 -7 years prison for abduction

# Evidence from Young Lives

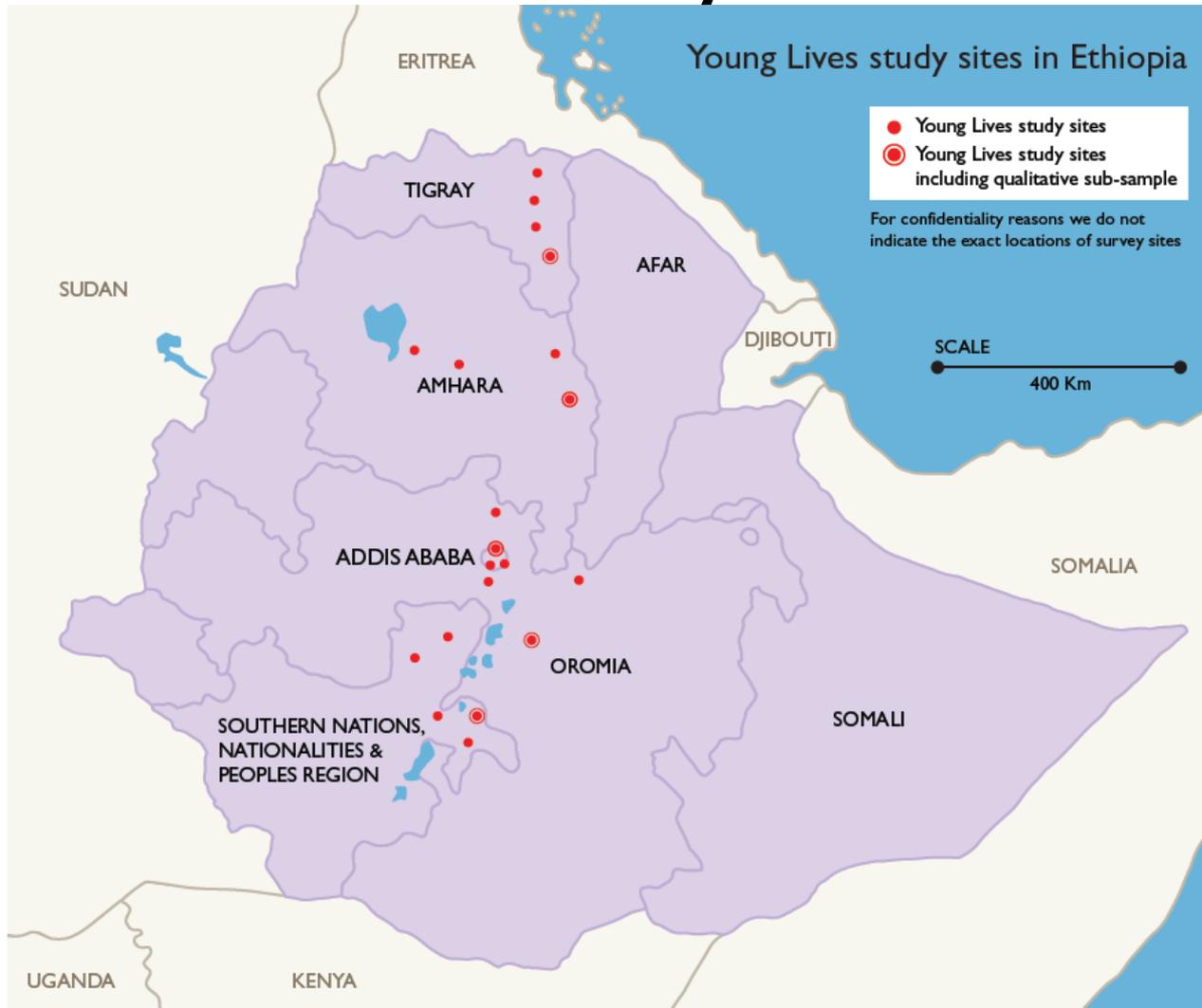
- Young Lives, run by Oxford University, childhood study in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam
- Study 12,000 children born in 2001/2 and 1994/5 from 2002-2017
- Young lives Ethiopia (1000 older cohort; 2000 younger cohorts)
  - Survey: 20 sites : Addis Ababa, Amhara, Oromia, SNNP, Tigray
  - Qual sub-sample 60 cases + 40 backups from 5 sites: 1 each Region
    - **2 urban** (AA + Hawassa)
    - poor areas, informal sector, crowded FHH, AA commercial sex work
    - **3 rural** but close to towns urban influence; wage labour opportunities

*Young Lives is designed as a panel study investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty*

**Young Lives longitudinal data collected in 4 countries:  
Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru, Vietnam**

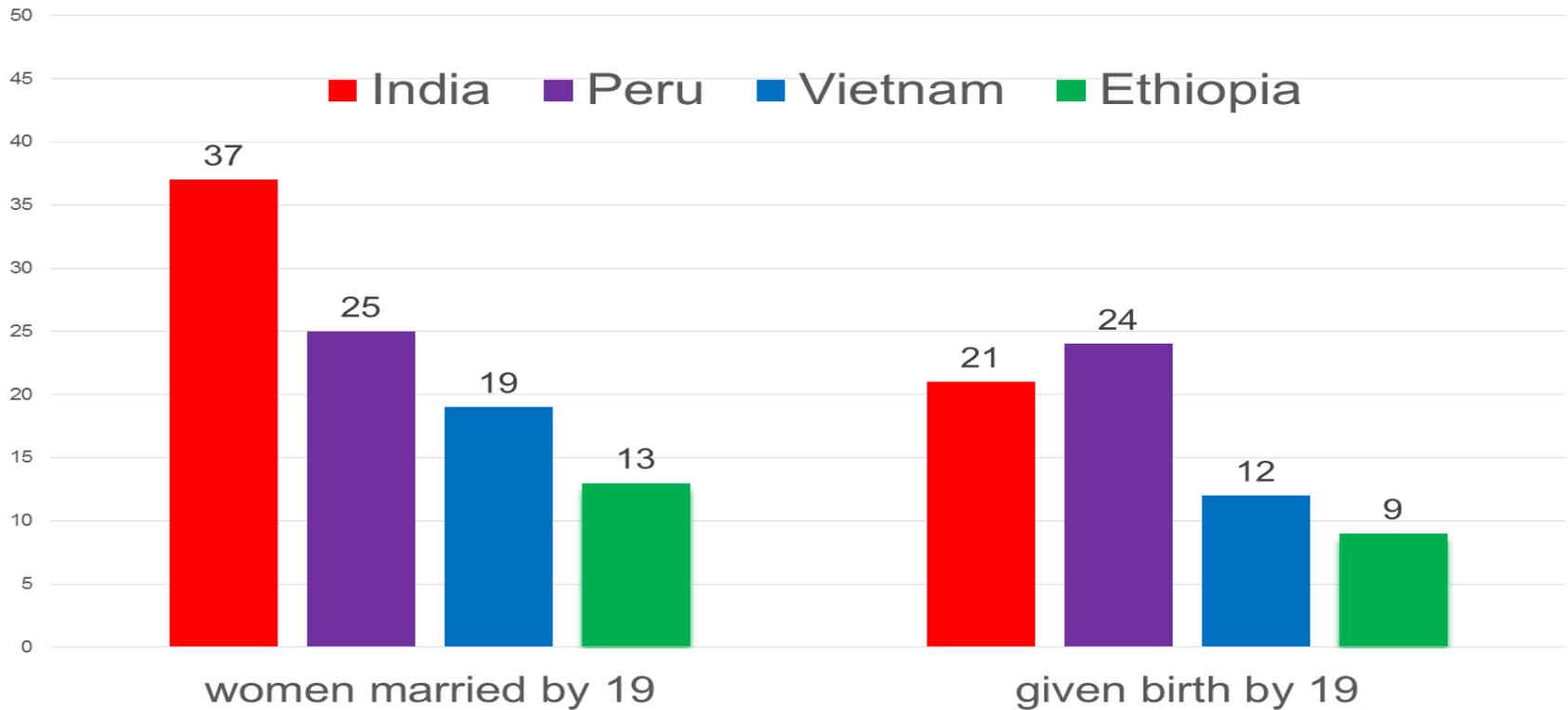


# The Study Communities

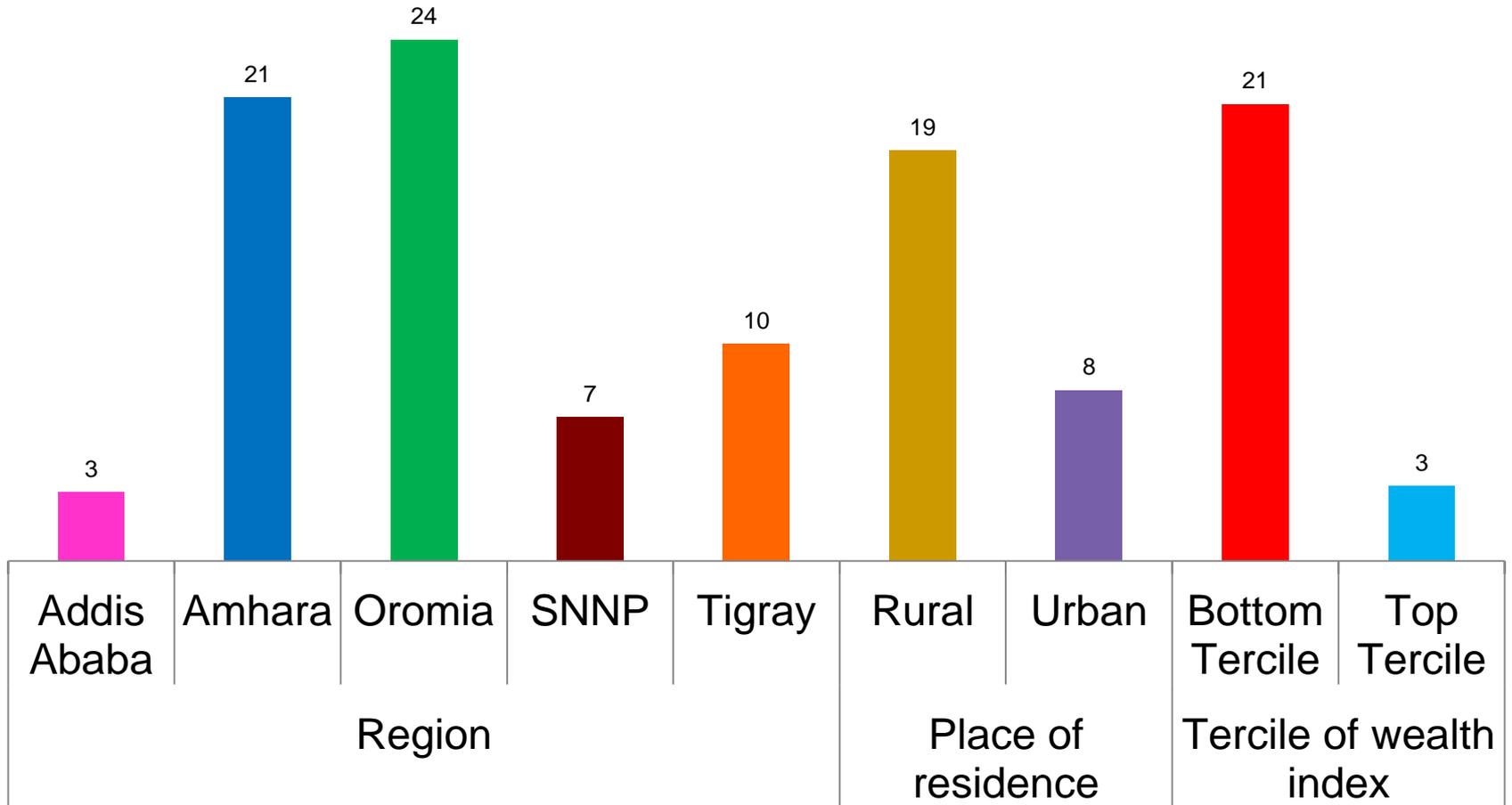


# Young Lives evidence (married at 19)

Women married by 19 and having given birth



# Young Lives Ethiopia evidence (Girls married at 19)



# Who and How they Married?

- YL 2016 - 15% of 18 year olds married

## Cases:

- 5 of 15 study children married and gave birth
- Formal marriage, North (Tigray), through abduction in the South (Oromia)
- 3 out of the 5 married case study children had lost their father and the fifth her father was not supporting the household.

- Beletech (Oromia) was a double orphan living with her aunt; she was overworked as the only girl, and eloped at 17, moved to rural area with husband; marriage not yet formalized; family relationship in problem.
- Fatuma (Addis Ababa)- was helping ailing mother in income generating activity, grade 10 finished, married to boyfriend but through family consent, one child, lives with daily labourer husband
- Ayu- married at 16, through ‘voluntary’ abduction; paid work, dropped in grade 2, moved to town with fishing husband, housewife,
- Sesen (Tigray) married a man whom she knew in paid work plant; family informed and agreed; provided dowry (gezmi) and housing -
- Haymanot (Tigray) – married at 16, with child, but divorced/remarried

# Negotiating Early Marriage

Haymanot (Tigray) got married at 16 against her will since her mother was ill and wanted to see her daughter married and secure.

*I asked my mother to stop negotiating with the elders. I begged her to work and help her for some time up until she gets well. I also asked her to delay the marriage as I was too young to marry. But she worried that she was getting very sick and she wanted to witness my marriage before something bad happened. Then, I said ok. (2011)*

At 17, she gave birth to first child, but soon divorced. Her mother claimed the in-laws believed the marriage was 'economically unmatched'

Then returned to mother, engage paid work, finally remarried.

First he proposed marriage by sending elders to my family. Though parents were willing I refused because I wanted to continue my education. He again sent his friend to me asking for marriage. I told them 'no'. One day he invited me to town and we had a cup of tea and talked about marriage. But after 2 months, in collaboration with his friends he abducted me when I was going to market and brought me to this town. My parents did not say anything. Recently, my husband paid 2,200 Birr to my parents as a reconciliatory payments (gaddissa). We took *tej*(mead), blankets and some money to my parents, and we were reconciled. My parents cannot come to my house until I give birth because the culture of my husband's ethnic group prohibits . I meet my parents outside my home. The marriage is also not yet formalized because my husband has to pay the bridewealth (gabara) which is five cattle. We need to save and give them to "legalize" our marriage.' (**'voluntary Abduction' Ayu, Oromia,2011**)

- My daughter got married... just last September...She agreed with her husband and married him without our consent. She married with her choice; that is it! She was married in a nearby place, nearby town. She has not come to our home and we have not visited her since she got married. The reason is that she got married without seeking our permission and against our interest and our tradition. We are not reconciled yet. (Ayu's mother, 2011)

# Family Concerns vs changes

- Caregivers/parents concern pre-marital sex detrimental consequences
  - Pregnancy, Abortion, child out of wedlock, break with parents and loss of their support and resources
- concern about voluntary abductions (elopement) (Oromia)
- Concern about girls' schooling notably going to urban areas
- Suggestions age threshold be brought down to 16 girls
  - Early sexually active
- Strong advocacy
  - state, media, NGOs
  - officials, women's association leaders,
  - teachers, health workers
- Clear awareness of caregivers, girls and boys -
- Teaching in schools, health risks, aware of penalties.

# Parents also promote changes

‘In our time, we were forced to marry. But my granddaughter is 14 years old now and if I tell her that she is going to marry, she will reply ‘I will report you!’ During our time, we were unable to decide on our life but today children have the right to decide. If parents attempt to marry them without their permission, they will sue their parents....Children today are very clever... Her life will definitely be good because she will be educated and may even marry someone who is educated. So both will live a good life.’ Haftey grandmother, Tigray site.

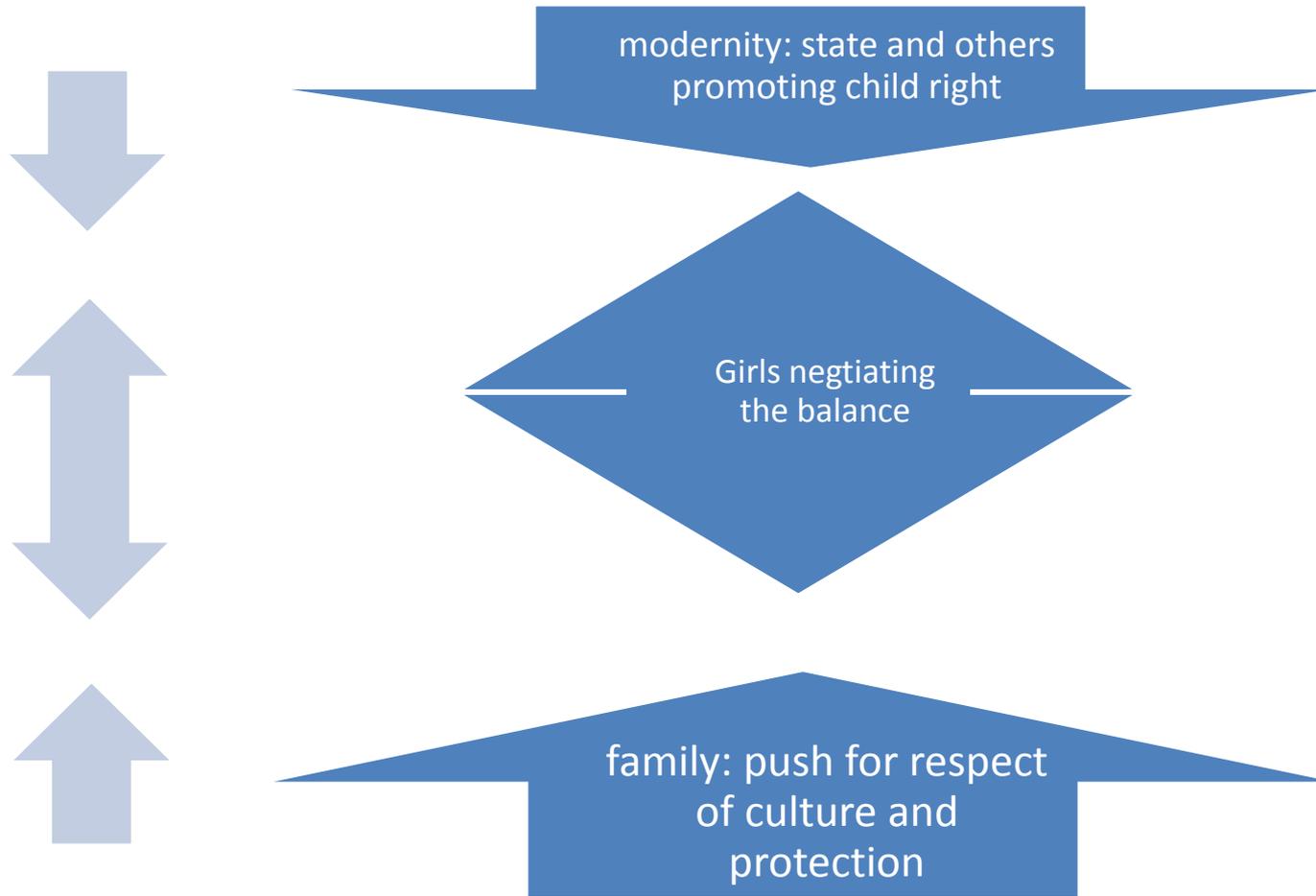
# The Findings

- Early marriage results from a complex interplay between community, household and individual factors
- differences in prevalence in part related to urban-rural, regional variation as well as cultural practices
- Early marriage is clearly partly linked to **poverty**, but in addition to family circumstances notably parental death and illness matter.
- Early marriage is option to poor educational progression and paid work to support families.
- Marriage can also be an escape route from family pressures and overwork.

# Discussions: Child Right Discourses and Local Practices

- The state – promoting international child right commitment
- Family – trying to maintain traditional marriage believing as best for their children
- Children’s agency: Negotiation in between
  - Compromising the modernity ‘children right’
  - Negotiating the cultural and family values
- Right: is it prompting modernity or negotiating and compromising tradition?
- What holds for girls right in the context of poverty and uncertainty of educational achievements?
- Is age ‘18’ for marriage too late to reflect fast growing up girls?
- Should Child right discourses get redefined incorporating local practices?

# Girls negotiating changes and continuity



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