Young Lives

Gendered Trajectories of Young People through School, Work and Marriage in Ethiopia

Yisak Tafere and Nardos Chuta

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Summary

This paper discusses the school, work and marriage trajectories of young people in Ethiopia, drawing on qualitative longitudinal data gathered from 30 young people and their parents, and descriptive survey statistics. It contributes to the global debate on the linearity of transitions and seeks to establish whether gender plays a role in shaping young people's trajectories. The key findings include that children developed high educational aspirations and tried hard to achieve them, though often with little success. Poverty, work, illness, family-related problems, and (for girls in particular) early marriage had cumulative negative impacts, eventually forcing them to leave school. Furthermore, the transition to marriage affected young women and men differently, and getting married prior to finishing education curtailed the ambitions of some girls as they became housewives, fully dependent upon the income of their husbands. These findings challenge the normative understanding of 'transitions' by suggesting that they are neither clear-cut nor a one-off or one-way process. In Ethiopia, where poverty and strong social norms shape the majority of children's lives, their trajectories appear to be interconnected and overlapping, rather than distinct pathways. Finally, the paper highlights some policy implications, calling for comprehensive child-focused social protection interventions to reduce the negative impacts of both poverty and gender on young people's trajectories.

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Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

This paper explores the way gender combines with other aspects of social difference in adolescence to affect young people's trajectories into adulthood in Ethiopia. It attempts to establish what role gender plays in shaping these trajectories. It draws on Young Lives qualitative and survey data to explore the outcomes of a group of young people aged 19–20 whom the study had followed over an eleven-year period as part of a long-term investigation of childhood poverty in the country.

Despite Ethiopia being one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, the majority of Ethiopians remain poor.[1] Gender inequality is also in evidence, with Ethiopia ranking 129th in the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Inequality Index of 2014 (UNDP 2015). Work, education and marriage experiences play an important part in explaining the reasons for gender disparities.

A large body of literature on Ethiopia indicates that gender differences emerge abruptly with the onset of puberty, and that interconnected choices regarding education, marriage and work affect the life trajectories of girls and boys in different ways (Chuta and Crivello 2013; World Bank 2006; Crivello and Boyden 2012; Coles et al. 2015; UNPFA 2012). Social norms influence differing expectations for girls and boys. In general, boys are expected to become financially independent and to secure a good income, while for girls, much emphasis is placed on the importance of cultivating a good social reputation and on securing a successful marriage alliance (Coles et al. 2015). Young people's trajectories to adulthood in Ethiopia are therefore clearly gendered.

However, the literature on youth transitions is mostly based on research from Euro-American contexts (for a critique, see Morrow 2012). Transitions to adulthood are understood in terms of four key elements: leaving home, getting a job, entering a partnership and starting a family (Knijn 2012). It is important to ask whether this framing is appropriate for explaining the transitions to adulthood of girls and boys who grow up in poverty. Youth trajectories are shaped by a combination of individual and environmental factors (Booth et al. 1999) and our findings suggest that for most young people in Ethiopia, the transition to adulthood is not a homogenous experience; instead, it is a period of uncertainty, of flexible transitions and of heightened risk (Chuta and Morrow 2015; Chuta and Crivello 2013). For example, in an active extended family system, leaving home may not be part of the transition, even in families that are not particularly poor, and in some contexts, children start working from a young age, balancing school with work and therefore not experiencing clear school-to-work transitions.

Young Lives offers some evidence on how children growing up in poverty pursue their varied ambitions and on the gender dynamics of their trajectories to adulthood. Our aim with this paper is to contribute to the literature on gender and youth transitions in low- and middle-income countries by providing a view from young people's everyday experiences and realities, and to set out some implications for policy. We focus on children's inter-related trajectories through schooling, work, marriage and parenthood and show how these are

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1   The 2015 Human Development Index indicates that Ethiopia ranks 174th out of 188 nations.

shaped by both environmental and individual factors, including boys' and girls' constrained agency.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. The next section describes the situation of young people in Ethiopia, focusing on government policies on youth, education, work and early marriage. In Section 3, the data sources and methods are described while Section 4 gives the results: 4.1 presents the educational, employment and/or marriage status of the Young Lives Older Cohort at the age of 19, and Section 4.2 describes and analyses some of the trajectories of the young people in the qualitative sub-sample. Section 5 discusses the findings and finally, in Section 6, the policy implications of the paper are presented.

2. Youth in Ethiopia

The arm of the Ethiopian Government responsible for formulating youth policy is the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture,[2] which in 2004 launched the most recent National Youth Policy.[3] The policy is directed at the country's sizeable youth population, which constitutes 25.6 per cent of the whole population (37.3 per cent of the urban population and 23.9 per cent of the rural population) (CSA 2014).[4] The fact that most young people are located in urban areas reflects increased urbanisation and access to schooling.

Indeed, much progress has been made in expanding education throughout the country and in educational achievement (CSA 2014), reflecting a strong policy focus over the past decade on education. The 2012/13 education statistics indicated the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for primary education was 95.3 per cent (98.2 per cent male and 92.4 per cent female) and the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) was 85.9 per cent (MOE 2013).[5] The difference between the GER and NER figures suggests that a proportion of children receive primary education at an older age than is deemed appropriate, either through late enrolment or through slow progression through the grades.

Another major area of focus is youth unemployment and under-employment, which remain high in the country though with a slight declining trend in recent years, mainly on account of a boom in construction work opportunities. The rate of youth unemployment in urban areas was 23.7 per cent in March 2011. Female and male unemployment rates were 30.3 per cent and 16.5 per cent, respectively (CSA and ICF International 2012), indicating higher rates of female unemployment. Youth employment presents a particular challenge in a country like Ethiopia, where there is growing youth landlessness in rural areas and insufficient rural job creation, potentially leading to an increase in migration to urban areas (World Bank 2006). International migration in search of jobs also affects Ethiopian young people, and

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2   In 2015, the ministry was split into two: the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs.

3   The Ethiopian National Youth Policy identified ten major policy issues facing young people in the country: Youth, democracy and good governance; Youth and economic development; Youth, education and training; Youth and health; Youth and HIV/AIDS; Youth and social evils; Youth, culture, sports and recreation; Youth, environmental protection and social services; Youth and Internationalism and Young people that need special attention (i.e., vulnerable young people) (Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture 2004).

4   The Ethiopian National Youth Policy (2004) defines 'youth' as people who are between 15 and 29 years old.

5   The GER is the total number of students enrolled in primary school, irrespective of age, expressed as a percentage of the official primary-school-age population (all children aged 7–14). The NER is the total number of children aged 7–14 enrolled in school, expressed as a percentage of the official primary-school-age population.

employment opportunities in some destinations have gender preferences. For instance, girls are more likely to migrate to the Middle East, with some empirical studies suggesting they may be migrating as young as 13 years old (Jones et al. 2014).

In addition to education and work, adolescent marriage and fertility are increasing concerns for national policy. The legal age of marriage is 18 for both males and females, and marriages occurring earlier than this are classified as 'early' or 'child' marriages. The most recent National Youth Policy (2004) does not offer a direct policy approach with regard to 'early/child marriage' and fertility; instead, these fall into a category of 'harmful traditional practices' (HTPs) as part of the policy package on 'youth and health'. Since 1994, the Government has put in place various policy frameworks intended to contribute to the prevention and elimination of HTPs. One is a National HTP Platform chaired by the Ministry of Women and Children, established to oversee the implementation of HTP strategy programmes and their progress towards achieving the targets of the Growth and Transformation Plan. According to the National Youth Policy, the country's young people can actively participate in and benefit from the efforts to eradicate HTPs like early/child marriage, abduction for (forced) marriage, and female genital mutilation/cutting.

Although the legal age of marriage is the same for males and females, the reality is that it is disproportionately girls who marry below the legal minimum age. In recent years, girls' child marriage has registered a decline. In 2014, fewer girls aged 15 to 19 (20.8 per cent)were married than in previous generations. Of the married women aged between 20 and 34, 57.9 per cent had married by the age of 18, and 79.8 per cent had married between the ages of 25 and 29 (CSA 2014). This shows an increase in the age of girls at their first marriage, suggesting that child marriage is decreasing over the years. Perhaps this is the result of a combination of the expansion of education, international advocacy around children's rights and the national adoption of laws and policies that address child marriage (for more details, see Boyden et al. 2012).

By the time young women in developing countries reach the age of 25, nearly 60 per cent of them have become mothers, in contrast to young men, who transition to parenthood later, usually between the ages of 25 and 29 (World Bank 2006). In Ethiopia, the preference for high fertility encourages women to bear children early (MOH 2006). In addition, the combination of limited economic opportunity, poor access to services and traditional norms surrounding marriage and parenthood may encourage marriage at young ages (World Bank 2006;. Meanwhile, today's young people are better educated and more likely to marry later than previous generations. Where young men are concerned, the policy focus is not so much on 'child marriage', but on the barriers preventing them from getting married, namely, a poor education, poverty and lack of financial security (World Bank 2006). In rural Ethiopia this is exacerbated by problems related to youth landlessness (Fafchamps and Quisumbing 2005).

3. Data sources

This paper draws on survey and qualitative data generated from a cohort of children born between 1994 and mid-1995, whose lives form the basis of one of the main strands of Young Lives research. The survey data used come from one time point, the Round 4 survey in 2013, when the cohort were 18–19 years old. The qualitative data were gathered across four rounds of data collection spanning a seven-year period (2007–14). We use both data sources to explore children's trajectories and their outcomes at the age of 19.

The survey children are drawn from 20 sites from five regions: Amhara, Tigray, Oromia, SNNPR and Addis Ababa. A total of 908 children participated in the Round 4 survey. Of these, 52 per cent lived in rural areas and 48 per cent in urban areas; 54 per cent were male and 46 per cent female. From each of the five regions, one site was selected for the qualitative study: Bertukan (Addis Ababa), Tach-Meret (Amhara), Leki (Oromia), Leku (Hawassa, SNNPR) and Zeytuni (Tigray).[6] In each site six children were recruited, with equal numbers of boys and girls. The children and their families were visited on at least four occasions, when they were aged between 12 and 19, in order to generate a series of longitudinal case studies for analysis.

The qualitative study employed in-depth individual interviews and group discussions with children, caregivers, community representatives and service providers. Interviews were conducted on different premises within the communities, and later the recorded voices were transcribed and translated into English. Qualitative data gathered from all 30 of the children in this cohort were analysed for this paper. The cases selected for discussion were chosen because they illustrate the range of patterns and experiences with respect to the key transitions of schooling, work and marriage. Through the individual cases we can understand wider social processes, and situate these within broader trends from the survey.

4. Results

In this section, we present the findings of our study. First, we establish the education/employment status of the young people, on the basis of the survey of 2013. Then, we discuss the different life trajectories they have followed, focusing on schooling, work and marriage.

4.1 Overview of the education/employment status of young people

During the Round 4 survey (2013) the young people, aged 19, were involved in a variety of activities, and when asked about their current education/employment status, they reported either studying, working, being married, a combination of these, or none at all (see Figure 1). While 3 in 5 of them reported having a distinct role, the rest were combining more than one role, such that 27 per cent[7] of them were combining work with education, 31 per cent were in education only, 28 per cent were only working and 3 per cent were married, with the females effectively remaining as housewives. The others were either combining two or more activities or reported doing none of these (7 per cent).

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6   Pseudonyms are used for sites with fewer than 40,000 inhabitants, to preserve the anonymity of those participating in Young Lives research. The names used for respondents are also pseudonyms.

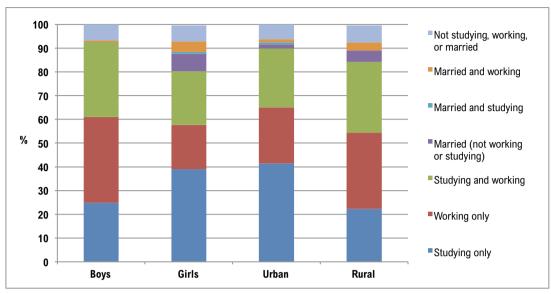7   Percentage figures are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Figure 1.   *Education and employment status of young people aged 19 (%)*

There are notable variations by location and gender. The percentage of young people from the urban communities who were in full-time education (41 per cent) was about double that of those living in rural areas (22 per cent). Conversely, more rural young people (32 per cent) were only working than their urban peers (24 per cent). Both rural and urban young people combined education and work, with the former doing this more than the latter.

As far as gender is concerned, females seem to have greater opportunity to focus fully on their learning than males (39 per cent vs 25 per cent) and more males (32 per cent) combine work and education than females (23 per cent). Rural females were more likely than urban females to report being married by the age of 19 and many of them worked after marriage but none of them were enrolled in education.

Similarly, half of the young people in the qualitative study were in education while the rest were fully engaged in work (having left education). Five girls (one urban and four rural) were married, and all those who were either married or in school were also engaged in some type of work.

4.2.   Youth trajectories

In this section, we present the schooling, work and marriage trajectories of the young people in our study. We first provide an overview by describing their trajectories using the survey data. Then, we illustrate the trends with examples from the qualitative longitudinal data and life history data to show how differing aspects of their trajectories are interconnected and how past events may continue to shape young people's present and future lives.

4.2.1.   Schooling

At the age of 19, more than half of the young people surveyed were still at school. The fact that only a quarter of them were able to progress beyond secondary level suggests that many others could not achieve the expected grade for their age. The gender disparity was evident, with girls more likely to progress in their education. Girls appeared to be better able to combine their family work with their schooling, and thus had more opportunity to progress. In contrast, boys found it difficult to combine farming or paid work in urban areas with schooling.

Table 1. *Grade or educational level of young people aged 19, by gender*

Education level enrolled in	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
None	212	43.53	156	37.14	368	40.57
Primary	79	16.22	59	14.05	138	15.21
Secondary (9–10)	98	20.12	89	21.19	187	20.62
Pre-university grades (11–12)	38	7.80	50	11.90	88	9.70
Vocational/diploma	36	7.39	42	10.00	78	8.60
University	24	4.93	24	5.71	48	5.29
Total	487	100	420	100	907	100

The survey data (Table 1) also show that a large proportion of the young people, aged 19, were no longer in school. Table 2 shows the highest grade reached by the 368 young people who had left education. Many of them had left before finishing secondary school, with a greater number of boys than girls leaving school. Girls, on the other hand, were more able to manage their household chores alongside primary schooling.

Table 2. *Highest grade or educational level reached by young people before leaving education, by gender*

Highest grade reached	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
None	9	4.25	5	3.21	14	3.8
Lower primary (1–4)	51	24.06	29	18.59	80	21.74
Upper primary (5–8)	86	40.57	59	37.82	145	39.4
Secondary (9–10)	57	26.89	52	33.33	109	29.62
Pre-university grades (11–12)	6	2.83	3	1.92	9	2.45
Vocational/diploma	2	0.94	8	5.13	10	2.72
University	1	0.47	0	0	1	0.27
Total	212	100	156	100	368	100

The young people's reasons for leaving school were associated with work, financial problems, ill health, marriage or school-related issues such as bad behaviour or absenteeism, as well as ill treatment at school. More males than females, and, interestingly, more urban young people than rural ones left school because of family or paid work (see Tables 3 and 4). Marriage was also more of an obstacle to schooling for rural females than for urban ones.

Table 3.   *Reasons why young people left education, by gender*

	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Financial issues	22	9.95	22	13.66	44	11.52
Banned (behaviour/absenteeism)	42	19	32	19.88	74	19.37
School quality/ ill treatment in school	7	3.17	2	1.24	9	2.36
Work-related issues	109	49.32	40	24.84	149	39.01
Health issues/ caring responsibility	25	11.31	18	11.18	43	11.26
Marriage	3	1.36	26	16.15	29	7.59
Other	13	5.88	21	13.04	34	8.9
Total	221	100	161	100	382	100

Table 4.   *Reasons why young people left education, by location*

	Urban		Rural		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Financial issues	15	9.8	29	12.61	44	11.49
Banned (behaviour/absenteeism)	40	26.14	35	15.22	75	19.58
School quality/ ill treatment in school	2	1.31	7	3.04	9	2.35
Work-related issues	62	40.52	87	37.83	149	38.9
Health issues/ caring responsibility	10	6.54	33	14.35	43	11.23
Marriage	8	5.23	21	9.13	29	7.57
Other	16	10.46	18	7.83	34	8.88
Total	153	100	230	100	383	100

Despite having high educational aspirations (see Table 5) many children were not able to pursue their schooling. The qualitative data offer illustrative examples of children who left school, with detailed reasons. The reasons align with those mentioned above, relating to the survey, but give a deeper understanding of the challenges. We start with young women who had stopped schooling at a relatively early age, to do paid work, then had to marry, which made the resumption of schooling almost impossible.

Sessen used to live with her sisters, mother and stepfather in one of the hamlets in Zeytuni. From an early age, she did household chores and agricultural activities such as weeding and harvesting. She said,

> "I started working when I was very small. I was herding the livestock because I was the last-born child in the family and we did not have a boy. At that time, after observing my friends going to school, I wanted to start school. I started going to school, but I also wished to work. Finally, I opted to work."

> (Sessen, Zeytuni, 2014)

Although she was able to combine both family work and schooling, the economic problems faced by her household also forced her to do paid work. Sessen dropped out of school in Grade 2 in order to help her mother by doing waged work in a stone-crushing plant. She left school when she was 14 and did not return. She recalls: "I stopped school when my father died and my mother had no one to help her. I decided to help her by doing some work for pay." She was also selling cacti and doing other income-generating activities such as *sife* (embroidery), which she continued doing even after her marriage.

Table 5. *Educational aspirations of young people at the ages of 15 and 19, by gender (%)*

Level of education aspired to	Aged 15 (2009)			Aged 19 (2013)		
	Male (N=499)	Female (N=480)	Total (N=979)	Male (N=487)	Female (N=421)	Total (N=908)
None	0.2	0	0.1	1.23	2.61	1.87
Primary	2	0.63	1.33	1.64	1.9	1.76
Secondary	19.64	26.04	22.78	20.33	14.25	17.51
Vocational/technical institute	3.41	5.21	4.29	3.9	5.46	4.63
University (first degree)	69.54	64.17	66.91	45.38	53.21	49.01
Postgraduate degree	0	0	0	26.08	21.14	23.79
No data	5.21	3.96	4.6	1.44	1.43	1.43

Currently she is married to a man she met at her workplace. After they had spent some time dating, he sent elders to her family. Her mother did not know that Sessen was in a relationship until the day elders came to visit her. Sessen got married at the age of 18 and gave birth to a baby girl soon after her marriage. Following her marriage, she stopped working at the crusher plant and became restricted to doing household chores and caring for her baby. In addition to farming, her husband earned money by working at the crusher plant.

Among those children who left school at a young age is Gemechu from Leki community. Gemechu lives with his parents and siblings. He is the seventh of nine children, but both his younger siblings died. At the age of 12, he had been undertaking household chores such as cooking stew, washing clothes, cleaning the house, collecting firewood, fishing and ploughing. He also worked as a guard on other people's farms and earned 280 birr (about £9.00) for two months' work. When he was 13, he indicated that he wanted to become a teacher, although his parents wished him to be a doctor. Gemechu started school aged 7, but his education was repeatedly interrupted, because of his lack of educational materials, engagement in cattle herding for pay and conflict with his teacher. In 2008, his family forced him to drop out of school to work as a guard and earn money for the family. In 2014, he told his story as follows:

Researcher: Has quitting school influenced your life in one way or another?

Gemechu: No, it has not; it was my parents who made me quit school.

Researcher: Why did they make you quit?

Gemechu: They wanted me to get some money looking after other people's farms.

Though later Gemechu re-joined school in Grade 3, he left again because of conflict with his teacher about his late arrival at school. Then Gemechu moved to a different locality and stayed with his aunt for five months. In this new place of residence, he re-enrolled but quit again because of illness. The conversation continued:

Researcher: Are you attending school currently?

Gemechu: Currently I am not attending my education.

Researcher: What grade did you quit?

Gemechu: Grade 3.

Researcher: Did you reach Grade 3?

Gemechu: Yes.

Researcher: Why did you give up?

Gemechu: I quarrelled with my teacher.

Researcher: Did you have a fight?

Gemechu: Yes.

Researcher: What was the reason?

Gemechu: When I was fishing, I was not arriving at school on time. Because of that he sent me out of the class picking me from my classmates; and he said, 'Go back to your home.'

Researcher: Is this the reason why you quit?

Gemechu: Yes.

Researcher: How long has it been since you quit school?

Gemechu: I quit after I began several times. I passed to Grade 1, then to Grade 2. After that I went to town to join Grade 3, but in the middle, I became sick and returned home. I didn't even receive my report card.

He appears to have given up on schooling and instead wants to get involved in irrigation work to improve the lives of his family and his own (see also Chuta and Morrow 2015).

The stories narrated above suggest that children face multiple challenges that influence their schooling trajectories. While poverty remains the underlying reason, children also face other impediments that make continuing or resuming school almost impossible. For example, while the lack of a boy sibling in the family and the death of her father left a gap that Sessen had to fill, Gemechu had to carry out all the family work and income-generating activities, which led to his intermittent school attendance, causing conflict with a teacher and ultimately resulting in his early exit from school.

At the age of 19, both seem to have given up on schooling and made other life transitions; marriage for Sessen and full-time waged work for Gemechu. Their stories resonate with those of the many other children who left school with low levels of education. As indicated in Table 2, more than 64 per cent of those who left school left while they were in primary school. In their respective communities, schools and workplaces are available; making it much easier for children and young people to combine both activities. Many of the young people in the cohort who were attending school were far below the expected grade for their age (see Table 2). Their grade levels ranged from primary through to university level, with the majority at lower grade levels.

Despite facing multiple challenges, some children have a successful schooling trajectory. Two examples, a girl and a boy, illustrate why and how some children managed to continue their education. Mulu lives in Tach-Meret. She started school aged 7 and in 2014 she was in Grade 12 (preparatory to a university education) and she was expected to take a university entrance exam. Mulu had been doing domestic chores and, since the age of 13, also paid work. She picked haricot beans for a private enterprise at a fixed rate of pay. Following the death of her father, she had to help support her mother and sibling through paid work. Unlike the domestic work she carried out at home, the paid work had had adverse effects on her education and health. It consumed too much of her time and she had little to spare for studying. She also developed problems with her back by working long hours.

Mulu had been successful in her school trajectory, with the exception of an interruption at Grade 1 because she could not understand the lessons. She usually achieved a good rank at school and was determined to progress as high as possible, with the hope of becoming either a doctor or a nurse. To this end, she had to save some money during the summer of 2014 before she stopped working to focus on her education. She had the following conversation with the Young Lives researcher in 2014:

> *Researcher*: How many students from your school do you think will join university?

> Mulu: Most boys will succeed. There are no clever female students. For instance, I got a rank of 3rd or 4th from female students though I am a medium student from the whole class. This is to say, there are no strong female students.

> *Researcher*: What was your rank from your class this semester [Grade 12]?

> Mulu: I stood 8th from my class. Boys are very tough. There are many clever boys. My average mark was 77 per cent but I stood 8th. But in the past, if I could score an average of 77 per cent, my rank would be either 2nd or 3rd. Now, my rank is 8th as most of the students are clever.

> *Researcher*: When you were working, how were you managing work along with schooling?

> Mulu: I was focusing on my education a lot. I was working due to our poor [household] economy. But we didn't have any economic problem after my sister got employed. There was a possibility that my family could cover the work if I focus on my education.

Mulu's story shows how, despite living in poverty, some children were able to meet their basic survival needs as well as continuing in education. Her older sister seems to have supported her when she needed the help. She began to subsidise her and her family, helping Mulu to focus on her education.

A story of a boy from Zeytuni demonstrates how some children exhibit their agency in schooling despite a heavy workload and poverty. In 2014, Mesih was in Grade 11 (preparatory to a university education). As there is no secondary school in his community, he had to travel to a nearby town and live with his elder sister. He joined school late because he had a lot of responsibilities in the family work. He was herding cattle, cleaning their pen, collecting firewood and fetching water. In 2011, he worked in stone carving and selling, but stopped as the job was too difficult for him. At Grade 1, he had to quit school because of illness and did not resume it for another four years. But after he re-joined school, he became a good student and was always ranked first in class.

He is focused on his education and his parents also encourage him to work hard at it, as well as providing him with the necessary educational materials. He was ranked first in the first semester in Grade 11. He participated in extracurricular activities and spent most of his time reading books at school and at home. He has changed his aspiration from becoming a doctor to becoming an entrepreneur who runs a machinery business. He changed his ambition after he came to town and explored new opportunities.

The stories narrated above suggest that success in schooling does not mean being free from work. It rather indicates that a combination of environmental and individual factors mean that some children have the ability to manage both activities well. If any income earned through work is put towards their schooling, it can have a supportive impact. In the context of poverty, work can be a means to achieve educational ends (see also Tafere and Pankhurst 2015).

However, we also noted that many children found it hard to combine work with schooling successfully. At primary school, it was much easier to do both as the schools and the workplaces are located near to each other. At secondary school, some children did attend school while working, but combining schooling and work became increasing challenging. Both survey and qualitative data indicate that children had to either drop out of school and continue working or stop working and focus on their schooling.

4.2.2. Work

Those who were out of school during the 2013 survey were engaged in a variety of work activities (see Table 6). The majority were engaged in agriculture, with others self-employed or in wage employment and some with regular salaried employment. There was a noticeable gender difference in employment, with more boys than girls engaged in agriculture. A greater number (and proportion) of girls than boys were engaged in salaried jobs.

Table 6. *Employment sector for young people who work, aged 19, by gender*

	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Self-employed agriculture	191	46.81	102	35.79	293	42.28
Wage employment (agriculture)	8	1.96	5	1.75	13	1.88
Other agriculture	3	0.74	14	4.91	17	2.45
Self-employed non-agriculture	96	23.53	66	23.16	162	23.38
Wage employment, unsalaried (non-agriculture)	64	15.69	35	12.28	99	14.29
Salaried employment (non-agricultural)	37	9.07	52	18.25	89	12.84
Other non-agricultural	9	2.21	11	3.86	20	2.89
Total	408	100	285	100	693	100

As one would expect, rural children were more likely then urban children to work in agriculture because it is the main type of work available in rural communities (see Table 7).

Table 7. *Employment sector for young people who work, aged 19, by location*

	Urban		Rural		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Self-employed agriculture	24	8.6	269	64.82	293	42.22
Wage employment (agriculture)	3	1.08	10	2.41	13	1.87
Other agriculture	12	4.3	5	1.2	17	2.45
Self-employed non-agriculture	101	36.2	61	14.7	162	23.34
Wage employment, unsalaried (non-agriculture)	65	23.3	35	8.43	100	14.41
Salaried employment (non-agricultural)	59	21.15	30	7.23	89	12.82
Other non-agricultural	15	5.38	5	1.2	20	2.88
Total	279	100	415	100	694	100

Likewise, and in contrast to their rural peers, young people living in urban areas had better access to waged and salaried jobs.

The qualitative data reflect the patterns observed in the wider survey. Below, we present two cases of children to illustrate the diversity of work experience and outcomes. The first story belongs to a boy – Bereket – who tried to combine income-generating activities and

schooling, but eventually gave up school and continued with his work. The other story relates to a girl – Yenealem – who similarly continued to combine both paid work and schooling, but with a different outcome.

Bereket is a double orphan who lives in Bertukan with his grandmother and siblings. He is the last-born of four children and started school at the age of 7. Since his childhood, he has been engaged in different income-generating activities. He started with shoe-shining then changed to washing cars. He also worked in a garage and as a taxi attendant.

Bereket dropped out of school in Grade 9 because of financial problems and poor school performance. He indicated that he scored low marks because he was missing classes to do wage work. His work pathway was captured through a series of fieldwork interviews. In 2007, he explained his work and aspiration as follows: "I wanted to be an engineer because it pleases me. …. [But] If I don't get good result [to join university to learn engineering] … I will start a garage business because I believe it can change my life."

Before leaving school for good, Bereket had repeated Grade 7 then stayed out of school for two years. He did this because he preferred to work rather than attend school. In 2011, he had the following conversation about his work with the field researcher.

Researcher: When do you work?

Bereket: After school, on Saturdays and Sundays.

Researcher: How many days do you work in a week?

Bereket: I work for two days in a week and for a few hours after school on weekdays.

Researcher: How much money do you make when you work after school?

Bereket: It is not that much; it is only 5 birr (£0.15).

Researcher: How about on Saturday and Sunday?

Bereket: 15 birr.

Researcher: What kind of work do you perform at a garage?

Bereket: I change flat tyres and help my friends when they do it.

Researcher: Do you want to engage yourself in a business or do you want to continue working in the car-washing job?

Bereket: No, I want a better thing and want to do business.

Researcher: What kind of business do you want to work?

Bereket: I want to engage in car-selling business. I have already met some people while doing the car washing work and they have told me how to do it. So, I don't think selling cars will be difficult for me.

Despite all these aspirations and work history, Bereket seemed latterly to have less hope of succeeding in his business. In 2014, he reported that he was not able to start a business. He and his friends were organised in a group to work on car-washing and decorating, but they were not supported by the local officials. He said, "We were organised into groups, but they did not give us money [to start up a business]. Money is lent only to those people who have relation with [i.e. who are the favourites of] the *kebele* officials." As a result, he appeared to have given up on his childhood aspiration of becoming an engineer or of owning a garage business. He was instead contemplating going abroad for a better life.

Yenealem lives in Tach-Meret and she is the youngest of four children. She joined school aged 7. Although Yenealem was at school, she was also doing both domestic chores and waged work. Yenealem started doing household chores such as making the bed, cleaning the house, making coffee, fetching water and cooking stew as well as engaging in haricot bean picking for wages when she was 13.

During the second research visit, in 2008, when she was 14 years old, she took part in a discussion about her work history and told us this:

> "I do paid work to earn some money. I work before or after classes during the weekdays. If my schooling is in the afternoon shift, I go to work at 7am and work until 11am. If I can pick five quintals of haricot beans per week I can earn about 50 birr."

But her workload at home hindered her schooling. At the age of 14, she indicated that she had no time to study and felt tired from working. She said, "By the time I got home from wage work, I would become very tired and I couldn't study. Had I not gotten involved in this work, I would have been a clever student."

In the fourth round of fieldwork, in 2011, she indicated the necessity to continue working despite its impact on her schooling. She said,

> "The reason why I worked in haricot bean picking is because I am poor and there was no one to help our family. Our crop also failed and my mother shouldered all the responsibility. So I had to assist her. It is not only my obligation to engage in the job, but I just have to do it. But I fear this may be a threat to my future education."

The income Yenealem earned from haricot bean picking was used to cover her educational materials, but at the same time, working was also a potential barrier to achieving her aspirations. Initially, she wanted to be a teacher then she later decided she wanted to become an agricultural worker. Later, during the fourth research visit, in 2014, she indicated that she wanted to go to university and become a nurse. In spite of her paid work and housework, Yenealem had pushed her education further and reached Grade 9.

These cases reflect the work trajectories of the children included in the qualitative study. While all do some type of work, which generally affects their schooling, girls seemed to be better able to combine it with their schooling. Like Yenealem, some girls managed to do paid work such sorting haricot beans at home and did it out of their school time.

The most common trajectory is therefore: *schooling + work → schooling or work.* Like Mulu and Mesih, many children rely heavily on family support when they reach the level where they are no longer able to combine both.

4.2.3. Marriage

As presented above, only about 6 per cent of the young people, mainly girls from rural areas (9 per cent) were married at the time of the Round 4 survey. It is difficult to separate out their marriage trajectories from their choices and experiences related to schooling and work; indeed, they are intertwined. In the survey, although number were small, more girls than boys attributed leaving school to their marriage. However, the qualitative data paint a different picture; among our qualitative sample, marriage was heavily mediated by work. In other words, girls who had married did so after they had already left school, and often, they left school to work. Thus, one of the main underlying reasons was poverty, which put significant pressure on young girls to assume income-generating activities instead of going to school. Here, we present the stories of four girls, all from rural areas, who had married by the time

they were 19. One married while she was attending school, while the rest left school to work, then got married.

We start with Beletech, from Leki, a double orphan. Since her childhood, she had lived with her aunt, who was also her caregiver. She started doing household chores when she was 8. She started school when she was 7 but frequently missed classes because of illness and her workload at home. When she was as young as 8, Beletech was suffering from eye problems, malaria, headaches and colds. She indicated that she was heavily engaged in paid work and domestic tasks. In 2008, she stated, "I wake up early in the morning, clean the house, cook food, take the cows to field then go to school." She was the only girl in the family so she had to do multiple tasks. That had a negative impact on her health and schooling. Owing to her workload and the need to care for the older family members, she used to miss classes, which led to a low school performance.

Beletech comes from an area of the country where child marriage is not uncommon. Her marriage was not something Beletech had hoped for when she was younger. When she was 13, she said, "It is better to die than marry. Marriage is bad! Marriage even causes poverty. If I marry, I will become poor." She continued to reject early marriage and she was angry at her caregivers' plan to marry her. At the age of 14, she stated, "They just expect me to get married and earn them a bride wealth. They don't care if I learn or not." Eventfully, she had to interrupt school at Grade 6 to get married aged 17 through 'voluntary' abduction[8] (for details of voluntary abduction in this community, see Boyden et al. 2012). The couple arranged the abduction after Beletech's family had rejected a prior marriage proposal. Her suitor had proposed to her earlier by sending elders to her aunt (the caregiver) who had rejected the proposal, saying, "Beletech has to pursue her education." As Beletech did not believe that her caregivers were serious about helping her continue her education, the couple arranged the elopement with the support of a close friend of hers, who was also a relative of the prospective husband. When she was sent to a local market in town, she eloped with her future husband. Since then she has stopped going to school.

In 2014, we found her living in another rural area, setting up a new household with her husband and with a baby girl. She has converted from Christianity to Islam because there are no churches in her new area of residence. But her husband is a Christian. Marriage seems to have ended her childhood aspiration of becoming a teacher or a doctor. When she was 13, she told us she would marry a doctor but ultimately she married a farmer. However, she has a lot to be optimistic about. She is happy to have reduced her workload and to have set up her own life with the possibility of economic improvement. Her husband earns money through farming and fishing and she hopes to start a small business.

Haymanot is one of the two married girls from Zeytuni community (the other is Sessen). The story of Sessen is already presented above in relation to work trajectories. Here, we present the life trajectory of Haymanot, showing the complexity of schooling, work and marriage experiences, the last of which also involved divorce. At an early age, she attended school, but dropped out of Grade 5 to do paid work and then married at 16. In 2011, she explained her experiences through the following conversation:

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8   This form of marriage needs the consent of the girl. If a girl wants to marry a particular boy, she may agree with him to arrange a 'voluntary abduction.' Then, elders are sent from the boy's family to her family to inform them that she has been 'abducted' and ask for marriage.

Researcher: You told me you dropped out of school at the age of 12. Was it after you got registered?

Haymanot: I stopped going to school after I got registered and for some months.

Researcher: Why?

Haymanot: Because I wanted to work.

Researcher: How do you see that?

Haymanot: That was not a good time; I felt very bad.

Researcher: Who told you to stop?

Haymanot: Myself because my mother was sick. We both decided after discussing.

Researcher: How did leaving school affect you?

Haymanot: I would have better job if I continued.

Researcher: Do you think it will make your life worse?

Haymanot: Yes, I do.

Researcher: What was your expectation?

Haymanot: I wanted to complete school and help my family.

The second child of three siblings, Haymanot lived with her mother, who was poor. When her parents got divorced, the mother was the main income provider. However, she was ill for years and Haymanot was expected to fill the gap. She began working at a private stone-crusher plant for wages from the age of 12. The work was so difficult that she injured her hand in the process. Her mother persuaded Haymanot to marry a man in their neighbourhood for both economic reasons and protection, hoping that her married daughter would have a better life and marriage would protect her from premarital sex and its associated risks. Haymanot married at 16. In 2011, she said, "Marriage has benefited me because I have got some rest. If I was not married, I would have been working in the crusher, which is tiring. Now, my husband is the source of family income." She thought marriage would end her life of hardship.

However, when she was four months pregnant, she and her husband got divorced. She then went back to live with her mother and took her baby girl with her. She continued to do paid work. All the aspirations of finishing school to help her family and having an improved life seemed to be unachievable. She grew up as a poor child and is likely to remain poor, at least in the immediate future.

The life stories of the married girls, including Sessen, represent certain trends, though with some differences. All had been living in poverty, but their lives were also complicated by family problems and ill health. They were expected to earn income, mainly because of their position within the household (for example, Sessen being the oldest child, Beletech the only girl in the family) or because their parents were unable to work (for example, Haymanot's mother was ill for years, Beletech's caregivers were very old). Wider community-level circumstances had an impact too. Private companies in the communities attracted child labour and these girls were tempted by the prospects of earning money, especially considering their dire economic situations. In Zeytuni, both Haymanot and Sessen worked in the privately owned stone-crusher plants. In Leki, Beletech was engaged in the private irrigation fields for pay.

These contexts not only offered work opportunities, but exposed them to relationships with boys who would be future husbands. Both girls from Zeytuni married boys who were colleagues at the stone-crusher plants. One conclusion that could be drawn is that marriage is an outcome of a long process of interplay between schooling and work, which themselves are influenced by gendered poverty. Their trajectories towards marriage generally developed along the lines of: *school→work→marriage.* Beletech's trajectory is an exception among these: *schooling + work→marriage.*

There are also variations in the process of marriage, mainly because of the differing cultural contexts. In the Oromia site, there is a strong cultural practice that obliges girls to marry through the intervention of family and clans, where a large bride wealth is involved (see Tafere 2015; Boyden et al. 2012 for details). In Tigray, marriage is also arranged by the family but dowry is involved. In both contexts, as presented above, the girls tried to demonstrate their agency in having a say in their marriage. This suggests, in some ways, that they have contributed to the construction of their life trajectories, but their agency needs to be understood within the constraints created by poverty, their cultural milieux and family issues, which play a large part in their pathways.

The data also show us that some young people opted for marriage only well after they had finished their schooling. For example, about one-third of the children interviewed at the age of 19 left school after finishing Grade 10 (Table 2) on account of not passing the national exam. Gender influences the options available to young people after they have failed their exams, such that boys may opt for pursuing work opportunities, whereas marriage opens up as a viable option for girls. Fatuma's case is illustrative in this respect. She had lived with her mother, grandmother, uncles and a brother in Bertukan since her childhood. Fatuma joined pre-school aged 4 but this was soon interrupted for a year due to illness. She used to do household chores, substituting for her mother who washed clothes for pay.

When she learned that she had failed, she started devising other coping mechanisms for survival, such as getting trained in sewing at the local mosque. She also joined technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and attended woodwork classes for some time. But since that was not of interest to her, she left. Then, she started learning computer skills alongside her sewing classes. Despite her efforts, she did not secure a job. After realising that neither further education nor jobs were forthcoming, Fatuma began to envisage getting married. She soon married and had her first child the next year. She preferred marriage to going to the Middle East for work, which she was contemplating doing after failing the national exam. Her husband is a daily labourer and the sole source of family income. They live together in a small rented house.

Her marriage can be interpreted as the outcome of an unsuccessful schooling trajectory. She gave up her dream of becoming a doctor and married a man she loved (although she had hoped he would be better educated). Now her aspirations are oriented towards family life, and she hopes to eventually have six children (three boys and three girls).

5. Discussion

This study has investigated children's work, schooling and marriage trajectories and examined gender disparities as they occur among the sample. These trajectories have been affected by multiple challenges, including poverty, workload, early marriage for girls and family-related problems.

For young people of both genders, poverty has remained a barrier to their education and has largely shaped their pathways. Many children from poor families had to combine their schooling with paid work. While some girls were able to pursue their schooling, many boys had to leave school and were unable to return, and for those who remained in school, their progress was often slow.

At a later age, some girls had left school because of marriage (often followed by motherhood), which marked an end to hopes of remaining in school or of returning to it, thus shifting their aspirations, at least in the short term, towards their married and family life. It remains unclear the extent to which any investments made in schooling (usually a few years of primary-level education) or time children spent in paid work translates into benefits in their married life, including the choice of marriage partners (who they hoped would be educated and better off financially than themselves). In reality, all of the married girls went to their husbands and started married life with few resources or skills for employment. They remain, at least at this stage, housewives, fully dependent on the income of their husbands. Adolescent marriage, thus, marks a point at which gender disparities widen, as girls are positioned as dependents within the marital relationship and husbands are expected to be the family breadwinners, a position which brings with it a degree of power.

However, the early marriage of girls should not automatically be deemed a negative outcome, and we saw considerable variations in what marriage meant for young women's well-being. In some circumstances, it could serve as a protective factor against extramarital sex, which could result in risks such as sexually transmitted diseases, early pregnancy, abandonment by a partner, and exclusion from family or clan networks (Boyden et al. 2012). And where other options are scarce, girls may see marriage as a viable livelihood option and an opportunity for improved social status.

The study also finds that family circumstances play a major role in influencing children's life trajectories. Children, both boys and girls, who have lost a parent (usually the father), or who do not have older or opposite sex siblings, carry multiple responsibilities. For example, Sessen, who had no male siblings, and Beletech, who was the only girl in the household, had to do all the family livelihood and domestic activities, including herding, domestic work and paid work; while, Gemechu, whose sisters had died, had to do all the household and agricultural activities. The schooling of both these children and others with similar family situations has been affected by workload.

Finally, this study challenges the normative models of transition (Valentine 2003) that seem to suggest uniformity in transitions. Schooling, work or marriage and parenthood are conventionally considered as 'normal' pathways in the transitions from childhood into adulthood. Entry to these key life phases is marked by distinct ages. For example, these days children are expected to start school at 7 and, by 18 or so they could have completed at least a secondary education and start working or get married. However, against such established expectations, our study shows that age rarely determined the life trajectories of

the children in our sample. As indicated in Table 1, at the age of 19, young people were in different life trajectories: either learning, working, married, doing a combination of these or doing none of these. They might start schooling long after 7, interrupt it for certain periods, leave before finishing their education, marry or get employed before 18. The context they find themselves in does not allow such rigidly timed pathways.

The assumption that youth life trajectories are uniform is more of a conceptual construct than a reality. Transitions are not clear-cut, nor are transitions a one-off or one-way process (Valentine 2003). They are rather interconnected (Morrow 2012) than distinct pathways. In Ethiopia, where the majority of children live in poverty and a strong cultural milieu prevails, the fact that youth trajectories are non-linear is a norm rather than an exception. The evidence presented in this paper also shows that girls pursue more unpredictable trajectories particularly because of the uncertainty regarding the age of marriage.

6. Implications for policy

In this paper, we have shown that although they were from the same birth cohort, children followed diverse life trajectories. The study shows that both girls and boys were generally unable to achieve their educational aspirations and make a transition into adulthood in the way they had envisaged.

The differences between their trajectories were largely due to varying impacts of poverty, their cultural setting, their gender and their urban or rural location, as well as to their family circumstances. Insofar as child rights discourses and national policies advocate ensuring that children follow 'conventional' trajectories, poverty and gender disparities should be addressed as far as possible. Based on our findings, we provide the following policy implications of the study:

- Poverty affected all children, irrespective of gender. Boys were less likely to attend school, while many girls were unable to complete their schooling mainly because they also had to work for pay and move towards marriage. To reduce the negative impacts of poverty, there is a need for comprehensive child-focused social protection interventions such as school feeding programmes, provision of educational materials and other subsidies that enable them to attend school regularly. Children can benefit from the expansion of education in the country only if they are helped to pursue their schooling properly.

- Family circumstances also played a negative role for some children. Death or illness of a family breadwinner or not having a sibling able to handle family work further caused some children to focus more on work than on their schooling. Family-based support may be necessary to address challenges of this kind.

- From this study, it was evident that girls were better at combining schooling and work and that seems to have offered them a marginal advantage for better educational progression. Once married, however, women returned to household chores, limiting the income-generating roles they used to fulfil. Unsuccessful schooling means children have limited knowledge and skills they can carry forward for their adult livelihoods. So, girls' early marriage needs to be addressed not just because it affects schooling but also because it also shapes adulthood livelihoods and especially employment opportunities. Thus, this requires a combined effort of dealing with local customs and applying the laws that offer protection from child marriage.

- Isolated interventions, for example, simply delaying marriage, do not help to ensure that girls will have a better adult life. Interventions should address all important life trajectories – schooling, work and marriage – so that girls can achieve successful transitions from childhood into adulthood. Successful schooling is more likely to result in decent jobs or good skills, enhancing their power and agency when they set up their adult household.

- Policy interventions could be of two types. First, children who are still in school but struggling to progress, or those who have interrupted school but want to resume it, may need support that assists their school advancement. For example, boys could be helped to pursue their education instead of going to work, and girls to complete their schooling instead of getting married early. Secondly, those who are no longer able to continue schooling need vocational training and employment programmes that would offer them the opportunity to earn income according to their educational and skill levels.

- In parallel, there is a need for national programmes that could address the structural hurdles for children, including poverty, gendered traditional practices and sometimes family circumstances that obstruct schooling. Children need to be a central component of national development strategies such as the Second Growth and Transformation Plan and measures to eradicate Harmful Traditional Practices. To develop comprehensive and continued interventions that would promote more successful transitions to adulthood needs timely evidence which, Young Lives, as a longitudinal study, can offer.

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Gendered Trajectories of Young People through School, Work and Marriage in Ethiopia

This working paper examines how gender affects girls' and boys' school, work and marriage trajectories across adolescence and into early adulthood in Ethiopia. It explores when gender inequality begins to open up in childhood; in which domains, how and why gender disparities persist across adolescence and into early adulthood; and, finally, whether and how gendered norms, values and practices impact on children's trajectories.

Drawing on quantitative and qualitative longitudinal data from Young Lives, gathered from children and their parents, we found that:

- children developed high educational aspirations and tried hard to achieve them, though often with little success;

- poverty, work, illness, family-related problems, and (for girls in particular) early marriage had cumulative negative impacts, eventually forcing them to leave school;

- the transition to marriage affected young women and men differently, and getting married prior to finishing education curtailed the ambitions of some girls.

The findings challenge the normative understanding of 'transitions' by suggesting that they are neither clear-cut nor a one-off or one-way process. In Ethiopia, where poverty and social norms shape the majority of children's lives, their trajectories appear to be interconnected and overlapping, rather than distinct pathways. Finally, the paper highlights some policy implications, calling for comprehensive child-focused social protection interventions to reduce the negative impacts of both poverty and gender on young people's trajectories.

Young Lives