

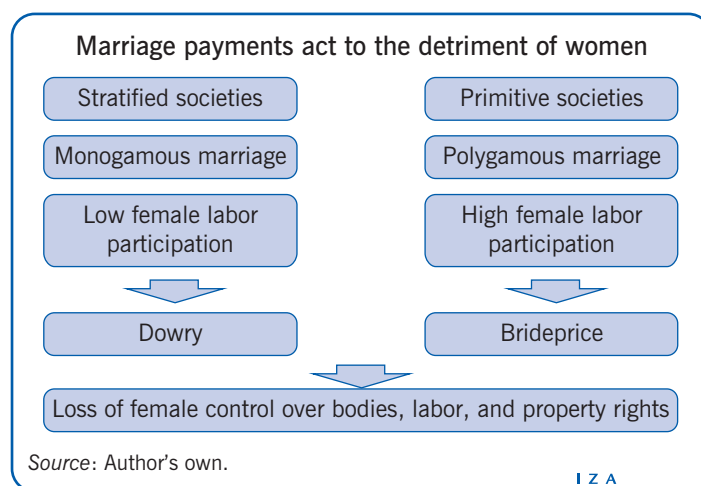
Human capital effects of marriage payments

Investing in female human capital can reduce brideprice and dowry practices and increase welfare

Keywords: marriage, brideprice, dowry

ELEVATOR PITCH

Payments at the time of marriage, which are ubiquitous in developing countries, can be substantial enough to impoverish parents. Brideprice and dowry have both been linked to domestic violence against women, and inflation in these payments has prompted legislation against them in several jurisdictions. Marriage payments are often a substitute for investment in female human capital, so from a welfare and policy perspective, they should be prohibited. This highlights the importance of promoting direct economic returns over legal and customary rights.



KEY FINDINGS

Pros

- + Dowry can lead to higher bargaining power for women.
- + Dowry can lead to higher male human capital investment.
- + Brideprices value the productivity of females.
- + Dowry can increase female rights to inheritance.
- + Marriage payments transfer wealth to the next generation.

Cons

- Dowry and brideprice are associated with domestic violence against women.
- Dowry payments force parents to disinvest in female human capital.
- Brideprices hinder the bargaining power of women.
- Marriage payments are large enough to impoverish parents.
- Initial processes of development inevitably cause marriage payments to evolve to the detriment of women.

AUTHOR'S MAIN MESSAGE

Marriage payments evolve in response to economic forces, and the initial processes of development inevitably cause marriage payments to act to the detriment of women. Such payments should be prohibited, and parents should be encouraged to invest instead in their daughters' human capital. Governments should promote programs to empower women through female education subsidies and targeted employment and micro-credit schemes. Indeed, marriage payments will disappear once women reap more equal economic opportunities relative to men.