

Prompt dower, women's bargaining power, and agency during marriage in Egypt

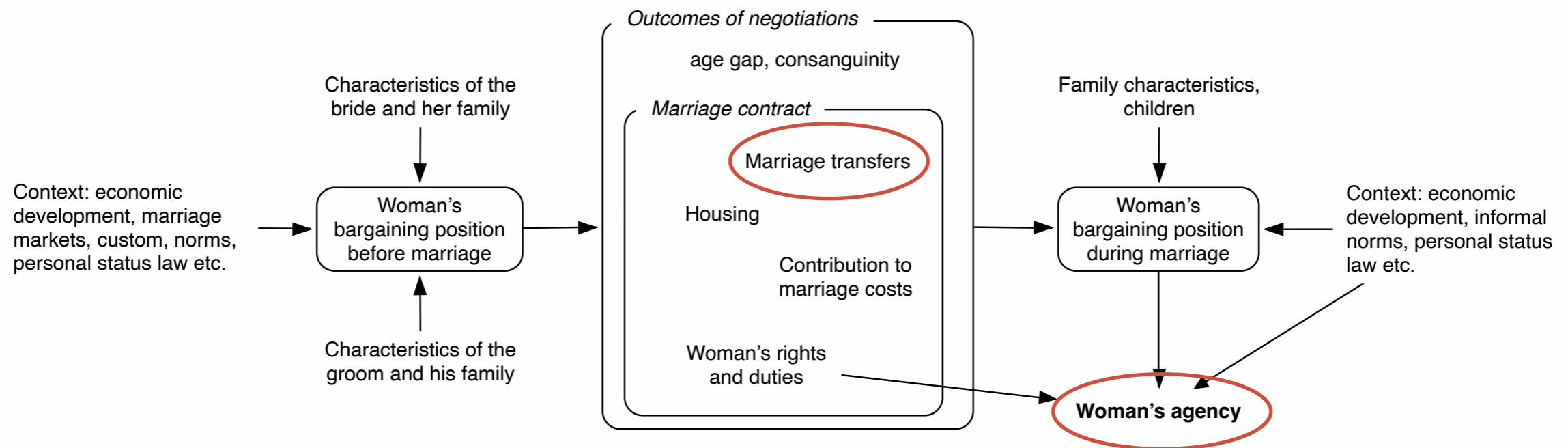
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Workshop: Analytical Sociology: Theory and Empirical Applications
November 14, 2022

Motivation

- Countries of the "Patriarchic Belt" are characterized by rigid gender roles substantially favoring men over women.
- Due to the high significance of marriage, these roles are very much defined by rights and duties of husband and wife.
 - ▶ Husband: Maintenance of wife and children, high personal freedom
 - ▶ Wife: Obedience, focus on children and marital home, low personal freedom
- Alterations of women's agency by bottom-up strategy: Bargaining before and during marriage on gender-specific rights and duties.

Two stage bargaining process



Marriage transfers, bargaining power, and agency

- Muslim marriages are characterized by transfers from the groom to the bride (dower), which become sole property of the bride.
 - ▶ At the time of marriage:
 - Prompt *mahr*: Prescribed for Muslim marriages, consists traditionally of money or means for investments outside marriage, became replaced by money for acquiring household-related tools and items, token transfer is possible
 - *Ayma*: Deliberate transfer of household-related tools and items that are bought by the groom and handed over to the bride at the time of the wedding
 - Marriages in Egypt typically consist of a combination of token prompt *mahr* and *ayma*.
 - ▶ At the time of divorce or husband's death (deferred dower):
 - Deferred *mahr*: Deliberate transfer of money
- Do marriage transfers improve women's agency by increasing their bargaining power?

Theoretical approach

- Separate spheres model (Lundberg & Pollak 1993, 1994):
 - ▶ Couples deliberately contribute to the production of household public goods (noncooperative bargaining) => risk of undersupply
 - ▶ Solutions at low transaction costs:
 - Division of labor according to traditional gender roles
 - Binding agreements before marriage (marriage contract), enforceable at low costs via custom and social norms
 - ▶ Deviations from these solutions require bargaining during marriage
 - Bargaining power depends on amount and productivity of resources individually controlled.
 - Threat points:
 - * Contribution to household public goods as if in the situation of noncooperative bargaining
 - * Divorce if things really go wrong

Theoretical approach

- Applicability to Egypt:
 - ▶ Property of husband and wife are strictly kept separate.
 - ▶ Division of household work follows traditional gender roles.
 - ▶ Marriage requires a marriage contract that may regulate the production of household public goods in detail.
 - ▶ Enforcement of agreements by religious and social norms, local customs, law
 - ▶ Need for bargaining due to imperfect contracts:
 - Changing conditions of the household
 - Inappropriate agreements due to local custom
 - Influence of third parties: Marriages take place between families not individuals.
 - Women may only be able to indirectly represent their interests via a male family member.
 - ▶ Marriage transfers increase the amount of resources under women's control => increase of bargaining power.
 - ▶ Threat points:
 - Traditional prompt *mahr*: Resources outside marriage matter for divorce.
 - Tools and items: Resources inside marriage matter for noncooperative bargaining, limited value in case of divorce.

Theoretical approach

- ▶ However:
 - Reducing the production of household public goods is risky for women as men can divorce easily at any time.
 - Risk of breaking agreements fixed in the contract
 - Women can only divorce if husbands do not carry out their duties.

Women's agency

- Part of the broader approach of women's empowerment (Kabeer 1999):
 - ▶ Access to economic, human, and social resources
 - ▶ Ability to define and pursue own goals (agency)
 - ▶ Capability to live one's own life
- Operationalization of agency:
 - ▶ Sole or participating decision making on, i.e., major acquisitions, buying daily food or minor tools or items, visits, or medical treatment.
 - ▶ Direct access to household money.
 - ▶ Freedom to leave the house, like going to the market, visits, or medical treatments, without permission or a guard.

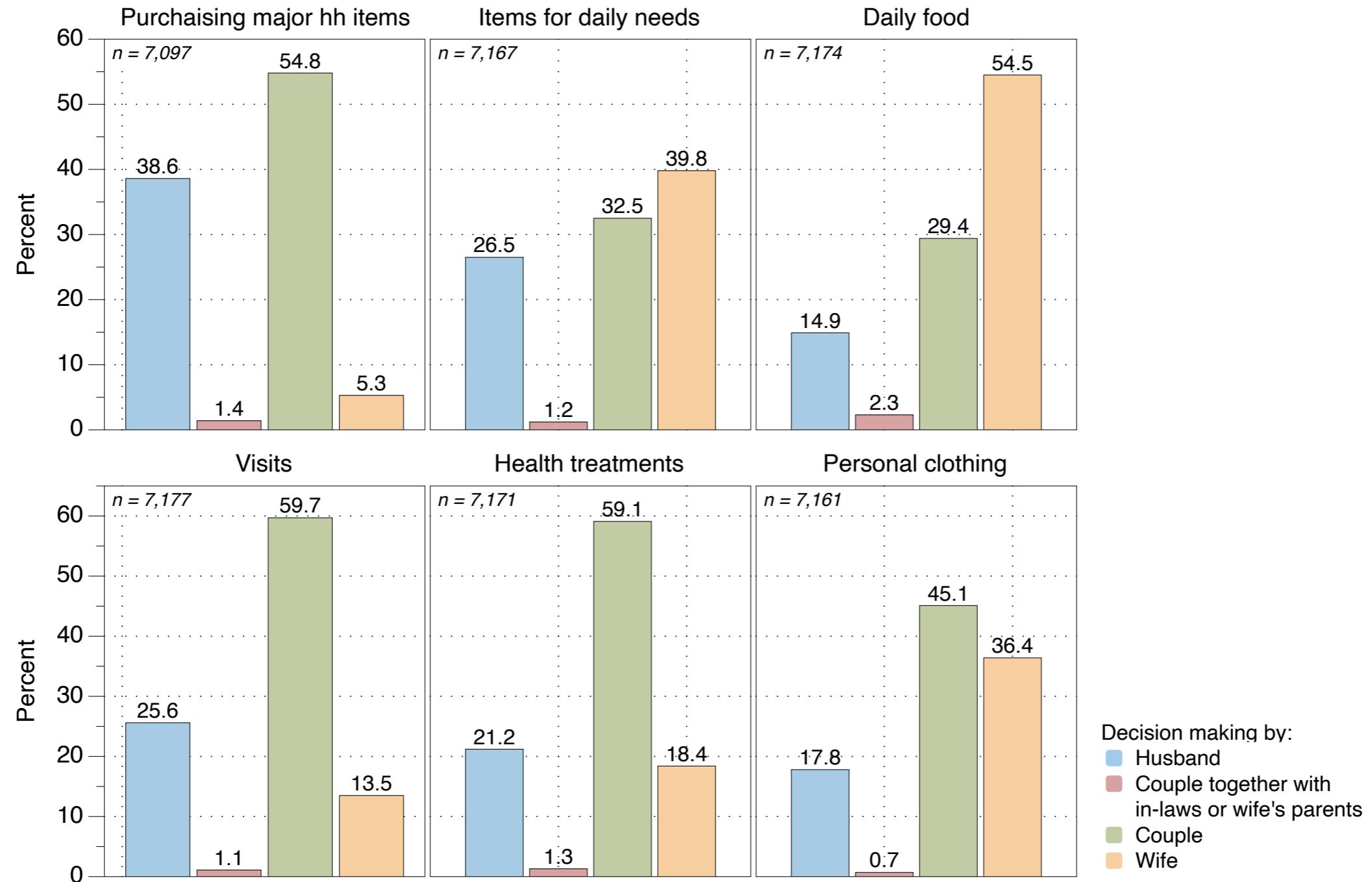
Hypotheses

- H1: The higher prompt *mahr* or *ayma* the more women take decisions individually or jointly with the husband.
- H2: Prompt *mahr* is an indicator for more traditional marriages. Compared to *ayma* its effect on women's involvement in decision-making should be smaller.
- H3: Absence of prompt *mahr* and/or *ayma* indicate less traditional marriages. Compared to situations in which marriage transfers took place, women's involvement in decision-making should be larger.

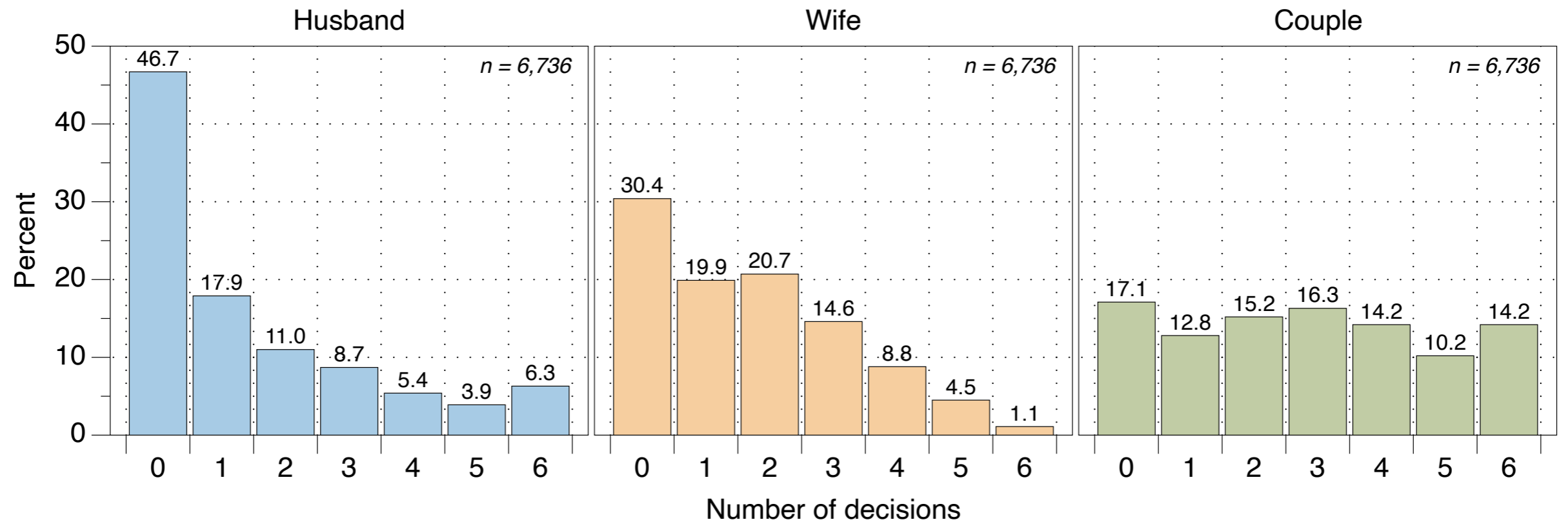
Data

- Labor Market Panel Survey for Egypt (ELMPS)
 - ▶ 3rd and 4th wave from 2012 and 2018
 - ▶ Household panel, all household members aged 15 or older are personally interviewed
 - ▶ Cases:
 - 2012: households: 12,060; individuals: 49,186
 - 2018: households: 15,746; individuals: 61,231
- Subpopulation considered in the analyses
 - ▶ First, muslim marriages
 - ▶ Respondents are 18 to 39 years old
 - ▶ Marriages took place up to 10 years before the survey => period 2002 to 2018
 - ▶ Information on both couples is available
 - ▶ => 7,189 couples

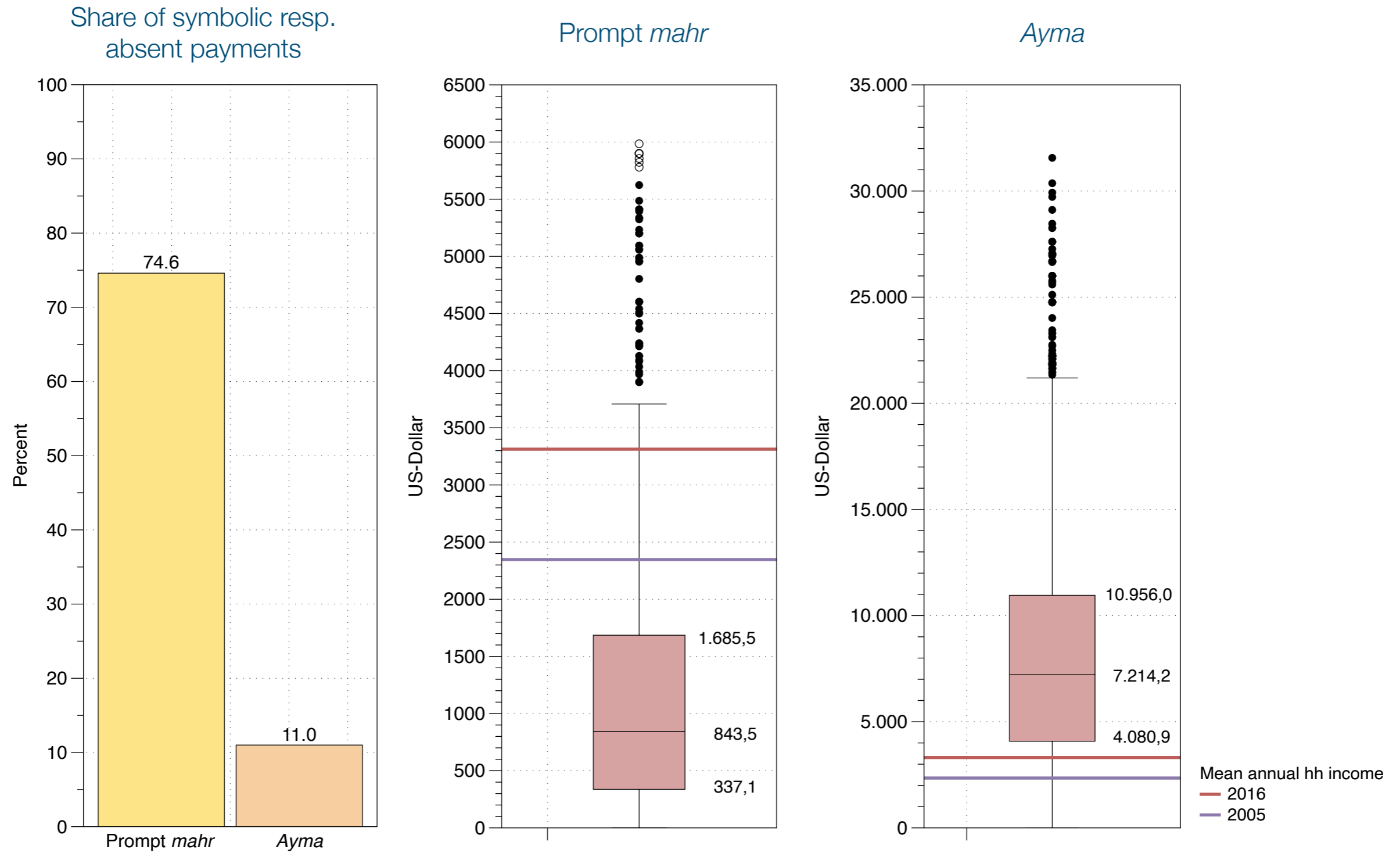
Descriptive results: Taking decisions



Descriptive results: Number of decisions by actor



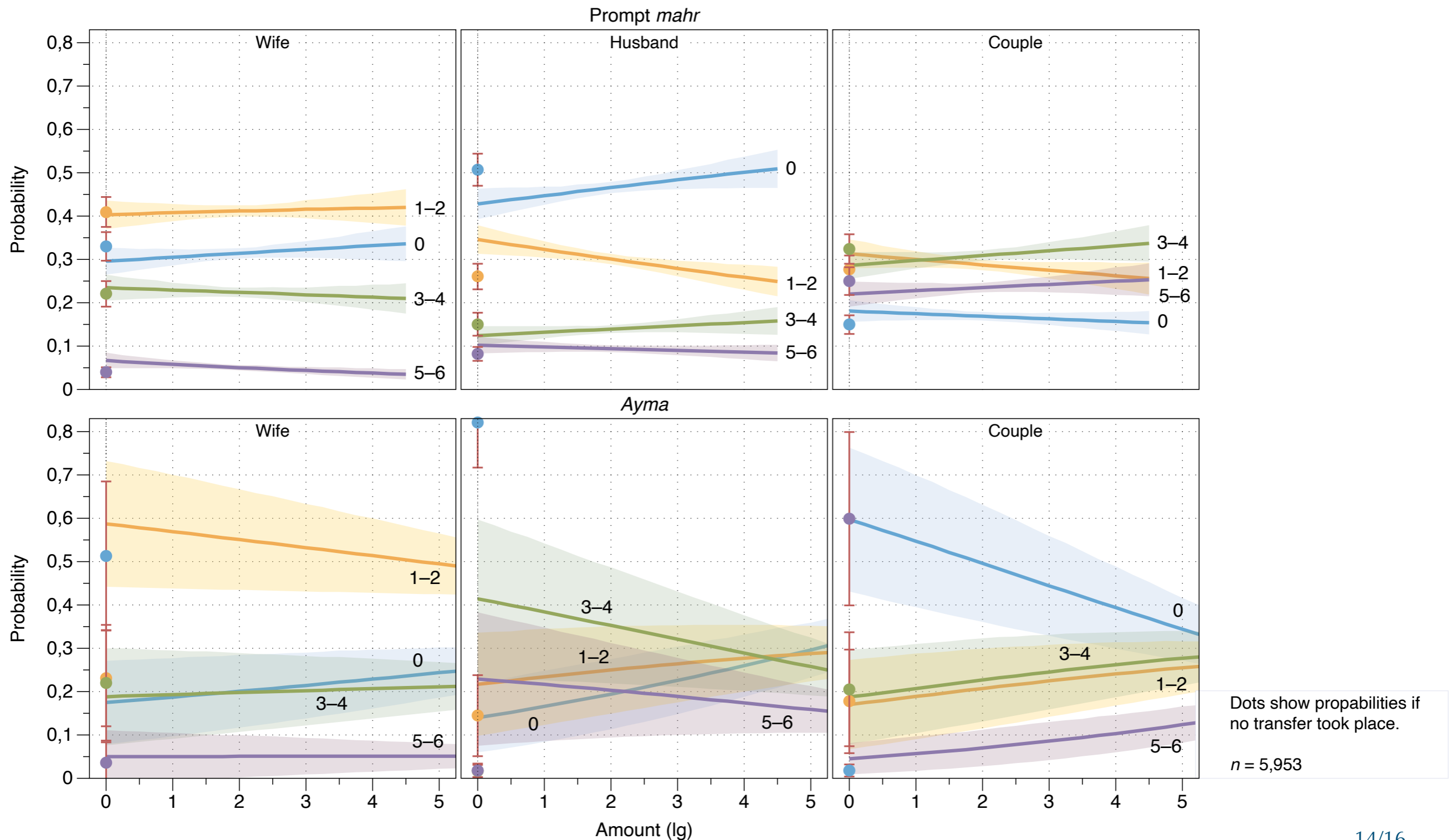
Descriptive results: Prompt *mahr* and *ayma*



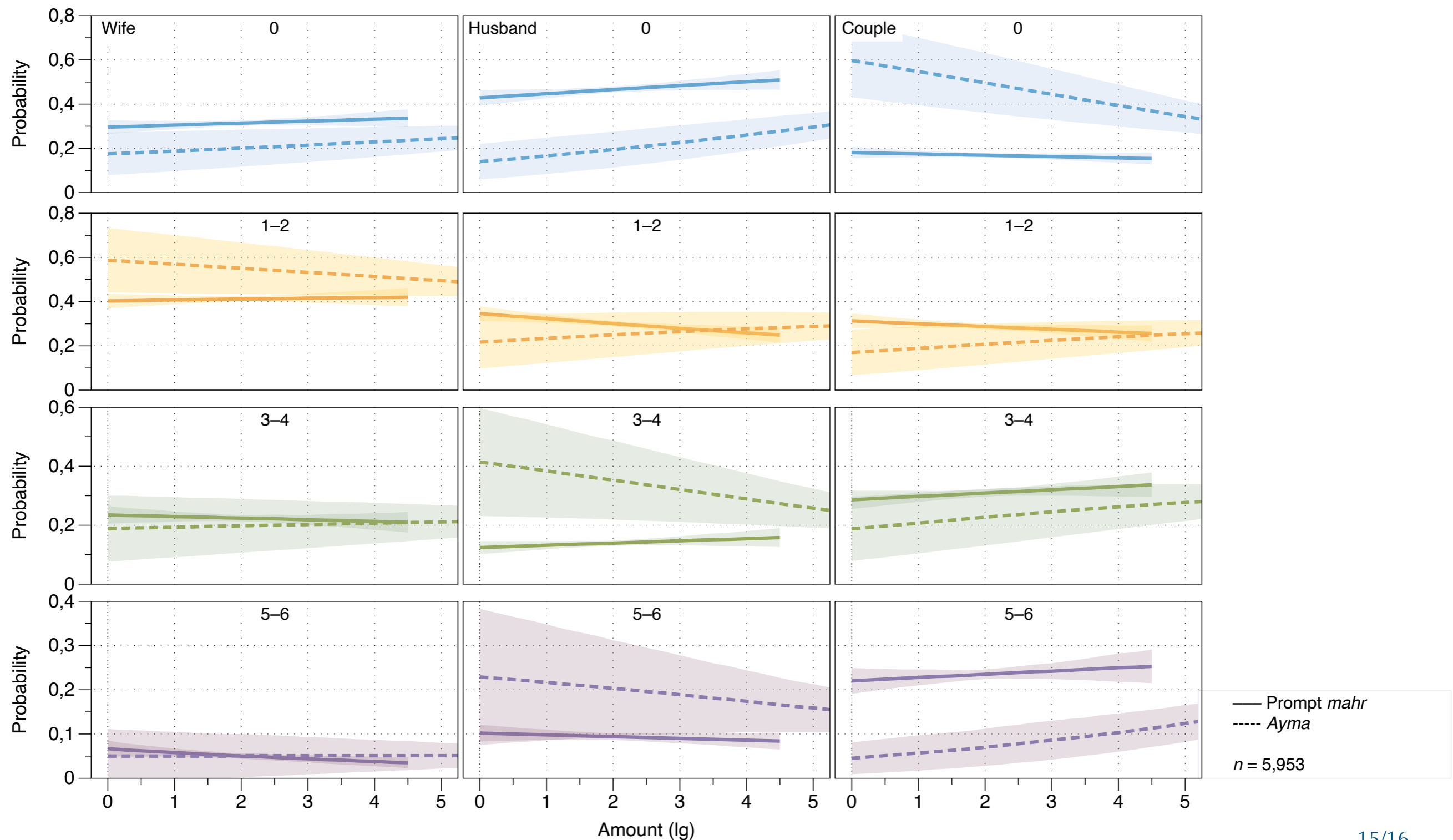
Multivariate Analyses

- Dependent variables: Number of decisions taken by wife, couple, and husband
- Multinomial logit, categories: 0, 1–2, 3–4, 5–6 decisions
- Central explanatory variables:
 - ▶ Amount of prompt *mahr* and *ayma* (log.), extreme cases excluded
 - ▶ Dummy variables whether prompt *mahr* or *ayma* was or was not transferred
- Controls: husband's and wife's level of education, age at marriage, and parental background, wife's employment, year of marriage, consanguineous marriage, region of living.

Multivariate analyses: Estimated probabilities of number of decisions, separated by actor



Multivariate analyses: Estimated probabilities of number of decisions, separated by actor and number of decisions



Conclusions

- H1: Higher marriage transfers increase the number of decisions taken by the couple. Limited improvement of agency.
- H2: In general, effects of *ayma* don't tend to be stronger than effects of prompt *mahr*, presence of reverse effects. Joint transfer of similar tools and items by prompt *mahr* and *ayma*.
- H3: Absence of *ayma* increases women's agency substantially => character of marriage matters, marriage transfers are in general associated with more traditional gender roles.
- Problems:
 - ▶ Bargaining power is indicated by one of its outcomes.
 - ▶ Problem of causality between marriage transfers and decision-making
 - ▶ Probably high influence by locals customs

Literature

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