

Marrying young or well-equipped?

On the trade-off between marriage costs and the duration of engagement in Egypt

Christoph Bühler
Leibniz University Hannover

Motivation

- Young people in the Middle East and North Africa have to postpone marriage.
 - ▶ Increasing marriage costs have to be covered primarily by the groom's side
 - ▶ High unemployment and high shares of informal jobs among young men
- Closer look required
 - ▶ Marriage parties aim at different target values: marriage costs, contributions from groom's and bride's side, neolocal household, consanguinity, age, age difference, education, social status.
 - ▶ Target values are selected and negotiated
 - Selected before engagement: age, education, consanguinity, social status
 - Negotiated during engagement: marriage costs, contributions by marriage parties, neolocal household
 - ▶ Two processes
 - Timing of engagement
 - Duration of engagement

Engagement

- Reduction of uncertainty
 - ▶ Withdrawal from marriage markets
 - ▶ Normative hurdle for competitors
 - ▶ Signaling of seriousness
 - ▶ Test period before marriage
- Institutionalized framework for marriage-related investments
 - ▶ Precondition for marriage negotiations
 - ▶ Investments into marital households
 - ▶ Marriage payments
 - ▶ Creation of relationships between the marriage parties via gifts and exchange
- Avoidance of premarital births and cuckoldry via regulations on sexual behavior
- Ensuring parental influence

Marriage negotiations

- Bargaining between families, brides may be represented by guardians.
- Bride's side has comparatively high bargaining power.
 - ▶ Groom's side has to take the initiative, bride's side can demand.
 - ▶ Demands may be used to attract or block marriage candidates.
 - ▶ Demands may rest on living conditions offered by the groom.
 - ▶ Weak threat point: High demands → risk of breaking engagement → higher age at marriage
- Target values to be approached at a maximizing or status-adequate level.

Marriage negotiations

- Major target values:

Target value	Bride's side	Groom's side
Marriage costs	High	Reasonable
Contributions groom's side	High	Reasonable
Contributions bride' side	Reasonable	High
Neolocal household	Yes (Bride)	Yes (Groom)
Consanguinity	No (Bride)	No (Groom)
Bride's age	Young (Age norms)	Young
Groom's age	Small age difference	When appropriate

Marriage negotiations

- Constraints
 - ▶ Willingness and ability to pay
 - ▶ Prices (particularly for housing)
 - ▶ Characteristics of bride, groom, and their families (age, education, wealth, social status)
 - ▶ Alternative marriage partners
 - ▶ Duration of engagement
- Trade offs between marriage costs and age
 - ▶ Bride's side: demanding high standards (furniture, housing) → increasing marriage costs
 - → long period of engagement → increasing age at marriage → declining bargaining power → increase of contributions from bride's side or lower standard of living
 - → increasing age difference (older grooms have more resources at hand)
 - ▶ Groom's side: demanding bride's optimal age at marriage → higher contributions from groom's side

Hypotheses

- Higher marriage costs lead to longer periods of engagement.
 - ▶ => Brides and grooms have to accept higher ages at marriage in exchange to higher standards of living.
- Neolocal households as well as higher costs for furniture and housing lead to longer periods of engagement.
- Older grooms lead to shorter periods of engagement
 - ▶ Older grooms have more resources at hand => brides have to accept older grooms in order to marry earlier.
- Higher shares of contributions by bride's and grooms' parents lead to shorter periods of engagement.
 - ▶ Parents had more time to accumulate resources.

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:
 - 2011/12: households: 12,060; individuals: 49,186
 - 2017/18: 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 => only “successful” engagements
 - ▶ Information on both couples is available
 - ▶ Exclusion of all engagements that took place up to 3 years before the surveys
 - ▶ => period 2001–2014, $n = 3,321$ couples

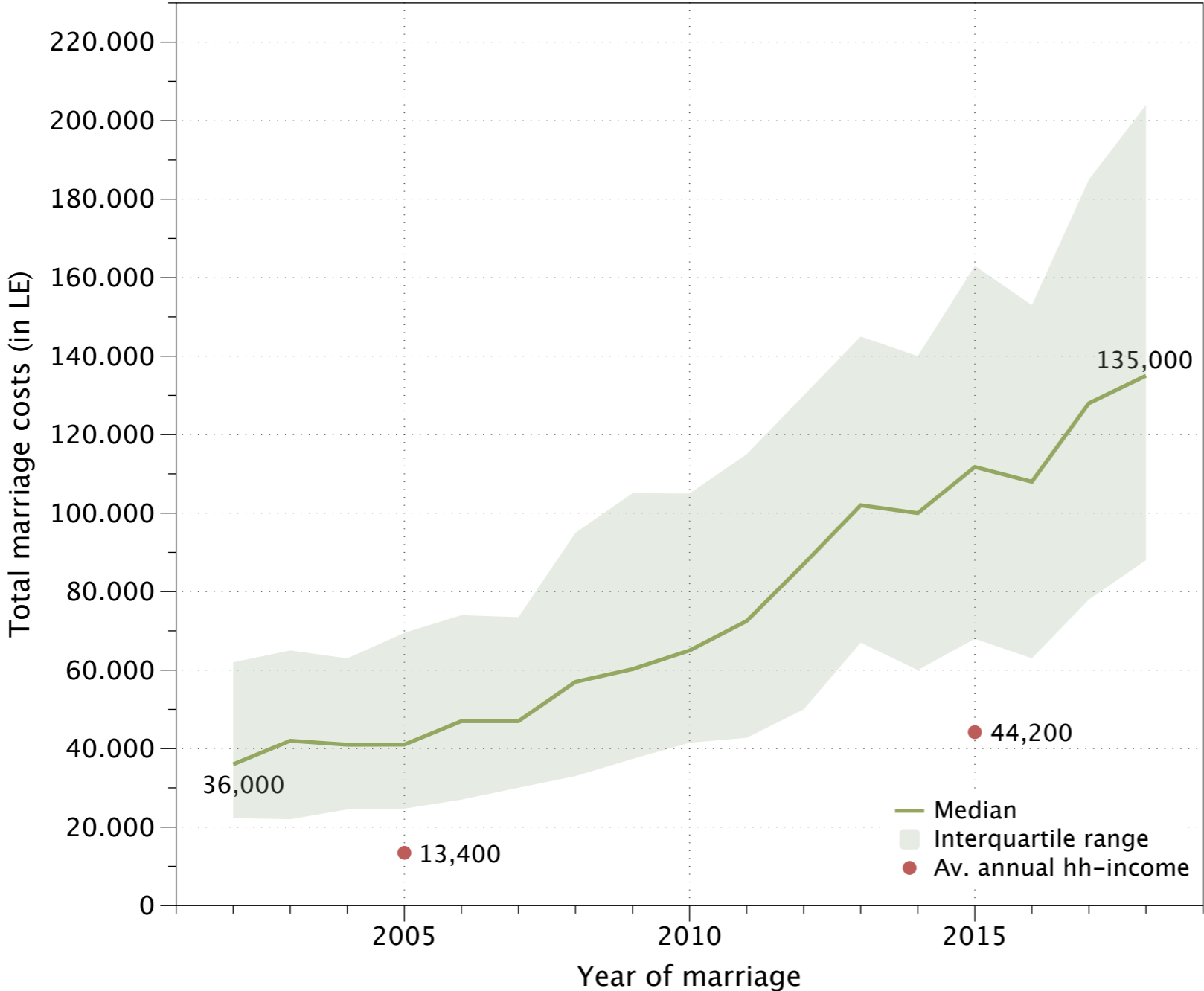
Development of mean age at marriage



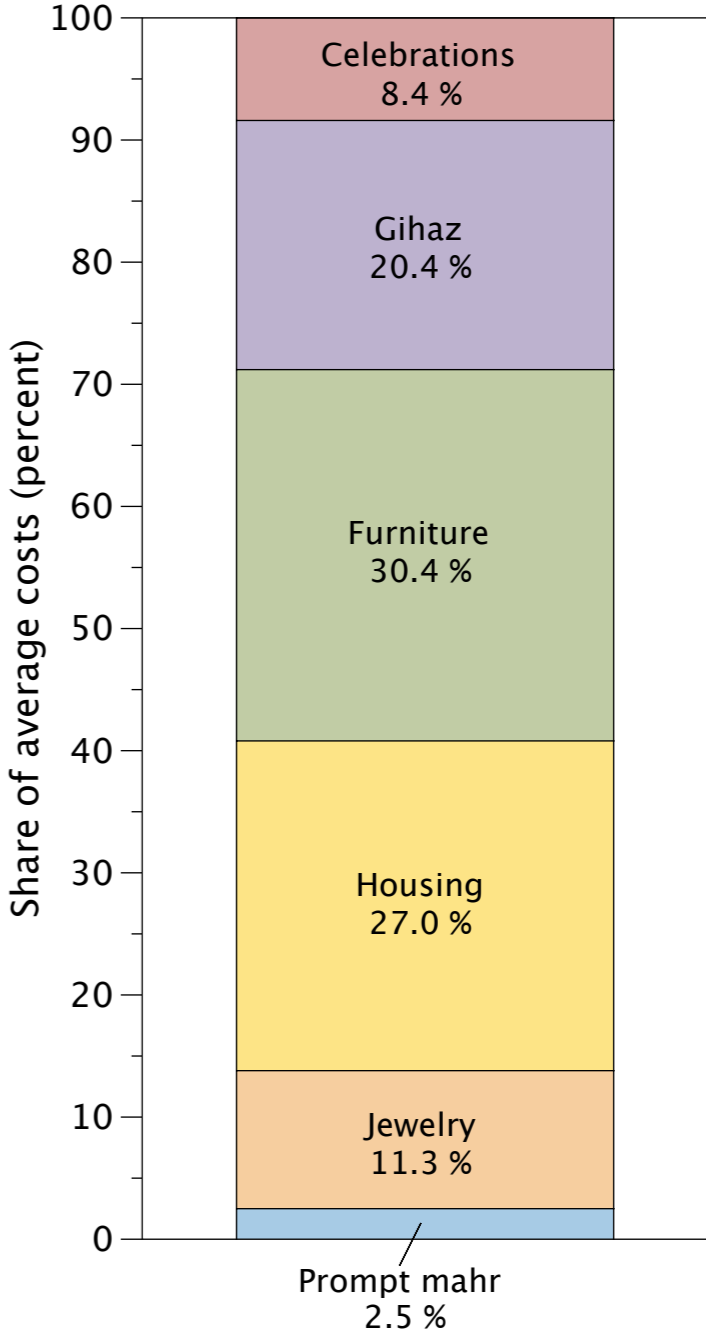
Source: The World Bank, Gender Data Portal

Marriage costs

Development



Composition



Source: ELMPS 2012, 2018, own calculations

Duration of engagement

Informal engagement

Women: $p_{0.5} = 19.4$
Men: $p_{0.5} = 24.8$

Same month: 76.4%, $p_{0.5} = 5$

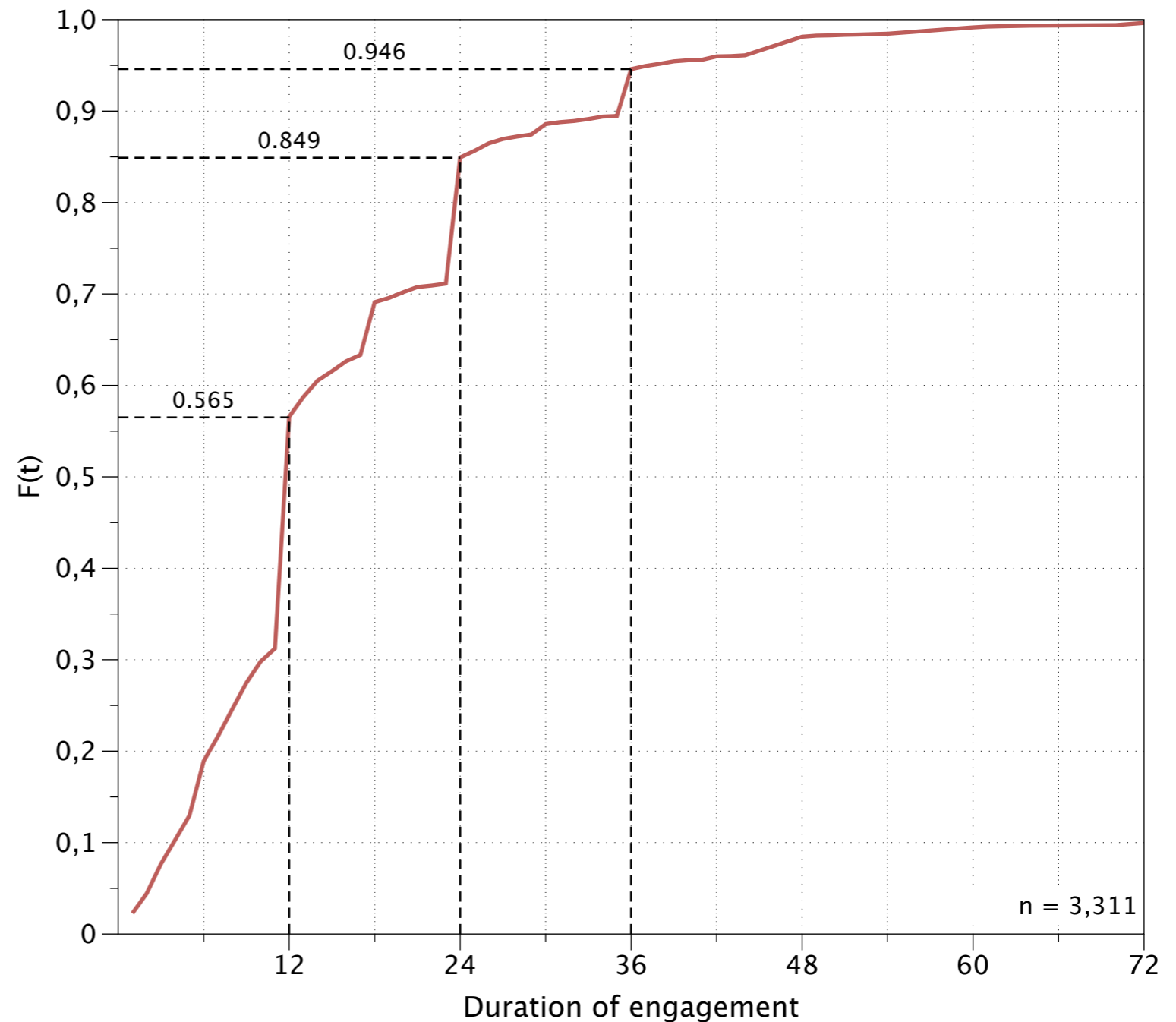
Formal engagement

Same month: 26.1%, $p_{0.5} = 12$

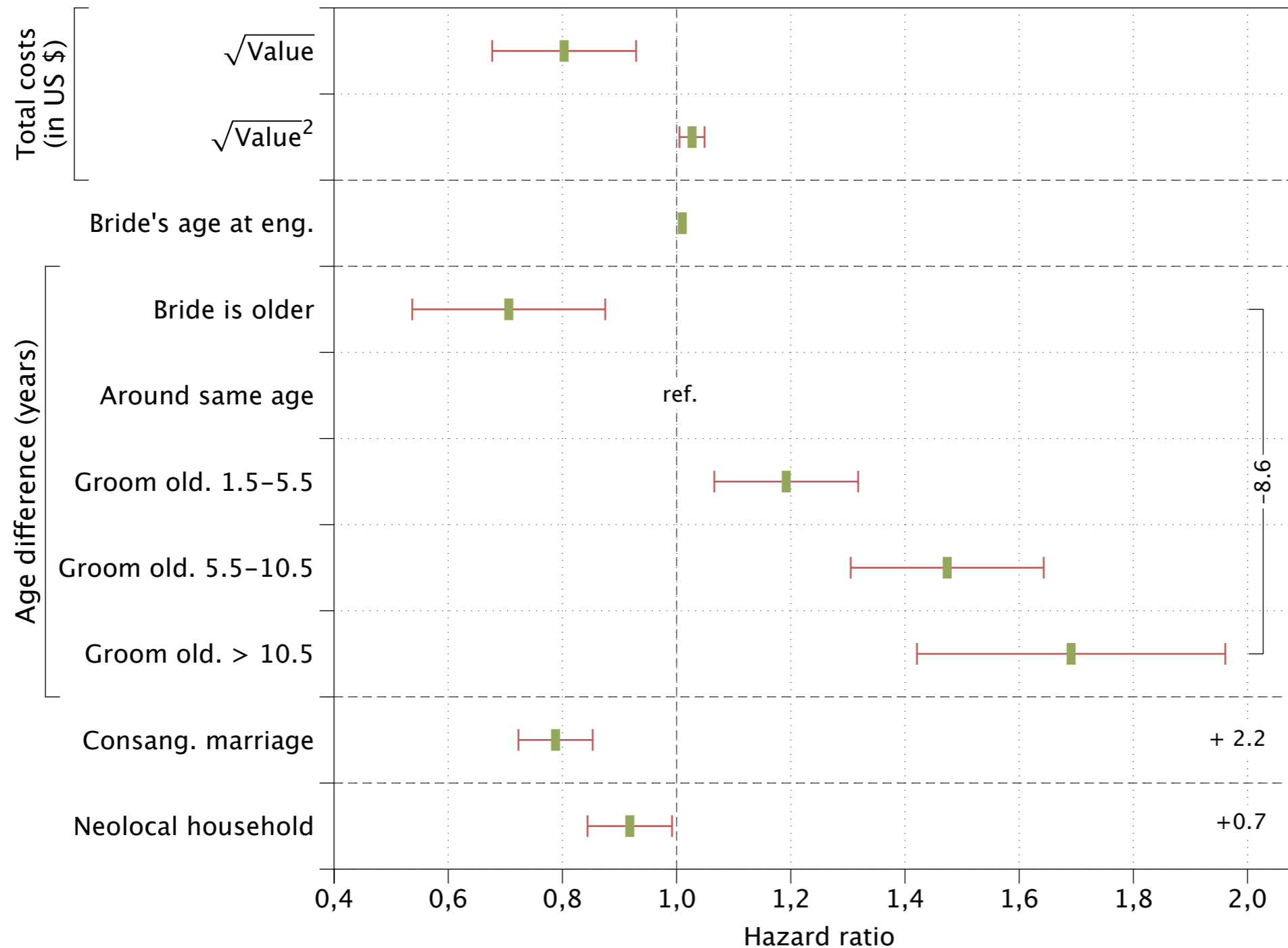
Legal marriage

Same month: 62.5%, $p_{0.5} = 8$

Actual marriage



Duration of engagement

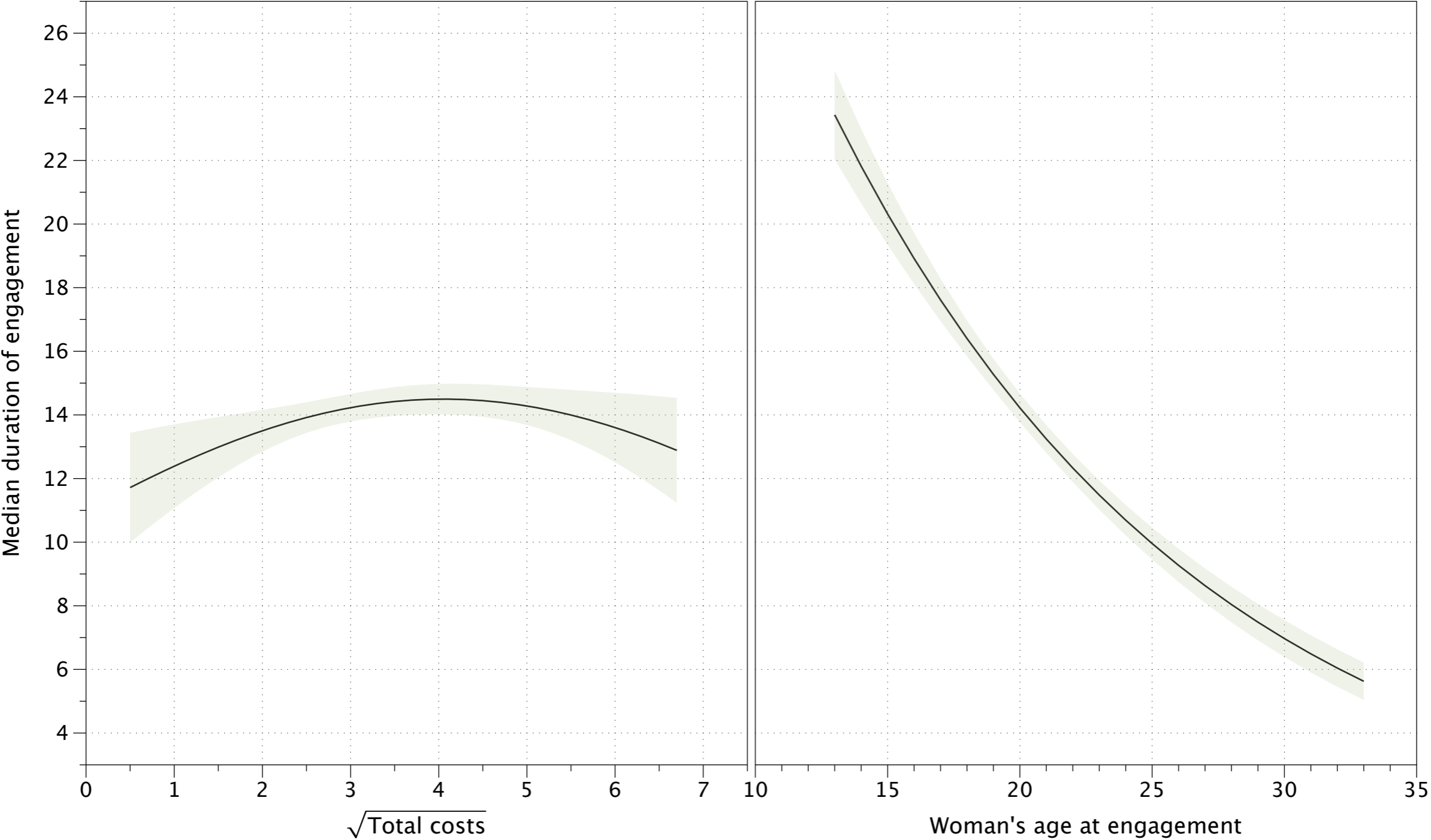


LL=-3338.317
 $\chi^2=644.62$
 $p=0.007$

n = 3,103

Controlling for bride's and groom's education, father's education, year of engagement, and region

Estimated median duration of engagement



Source: ELMPS 2012, 2018, own calculations

Duration of engagement: further results

- Components of marriage costs
 - ▶ Transfers with the character of a gift (mahr, jewelry) decrease the duration of engagement.
 - ▶ Mixed financing (gihaz) increases the duration of engagement.
 - ▶ Most costly components (housing, furniture) have no effect.
 - ▶ =>
 - Values of minor components with mixed responsibilities are negotiated.
 - Marriage parties know already at the beginning of engagements what they can afford according to housing and furniture
 - Expensive mahr and jewelry indicate wealth on the groom's side
- Marriage parties
 - ▶ Value and share of contributions of groom's parents reduce duration of engagement.
 - ▶ Groom's contributions matter as well.
 - ▶ Contributions of bride's side the no effect.
 - ▶ => Groom's parents are the key-actors, followed by the groom

Conclusions

- There is only some trade-off between marriage costs and length of engagement.
- Higher standards of living are not at the cost of substantively longer periods of engagement.
- Grooms from wealthy families make things easier.
- The general framework of costs is already defined after having selected the partners-to-be.
 - ▶ => Age at marriage is less dependent on the duration of engagement (negotiations) but more on the timing of engagement (selection).

Literature

- Assaad, Ragui and Caroline Krafft (2015a): The economics of marriage in North Africa. A unifying theoretical framework (pp. 72–85). In *The Oxford handbook of Africa and economics*, Volume 1: Context and concepts, edited by Célestine Monga and Justin Yifu Lin. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Assaad, Ragui and Caroline Krafft (2015b): An Empirical Analysis of the Economics of Marriage in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia (pp. 533–549). In *The Oxford handbook of Africa and economics*, Volume 2: Policies and practices, edited by Célestine Monga and Justin Yifu Lin. Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press.
- Lundberg, Shelly, and Robert A. Pollak (1994): Noncooperative bargaining models of marriage. *American Economic Review* 84:132–137.
- Lundberg, Shelly, and Robert A. Pollak (1993): Separate spheres bargaining in the marriage market. *Journal of Political Economy* 101(6): 988–1010.
- Rosenblatt, Paul C., Stephen S. Fugita, and Kenneth V. McDowell (1969): Wealth transfer and restrictions on sexual relations during betrothal. *Ethnology* 8(3): 319–328.