Working Paper 99

Young Lives
An International Study of Childhood Poverty

Intergenerational Relationships and the Life Course:

Changing Relations between Children and Caregivers in Ethiopia

Yisak Tafere

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Summary

Drawing on three rounds of survey and qualitative data collected by the Young Lives study in Ethiopia among children born in 1994–95 and their caregivers, this paper investigates intergenerational relationships by means of the life-course perspective. The life-course perspective establishes the importance of understanding intergenerational relationships within changing contexts of time and place.

The study shows that parent–child relations are taken for granted when children are young; but as they grow older, parental expectations and filial obligations become explicit. In the context of rapid social change, which sometimes carries risks for children, parents assume that they have an obligation to guide their children.

With the expansion of modern education and children's exposure to different experiences outside the family, many of them contest parental values, norms and expectations. Schooling and other competing agents of 'socialisation' have contributed to increased intergenerational conflicts and negotiations. One important outcome of such changes is the transformation of relationships based on traditional processes of socialisation where norms and practices have been simply transmitted across generations, into 'negotiated' relationships where children's agency become increasingly visible.

On the other hand, in the context of poverty and social change, children's key transitions have become more unpredictable. For example, at one and the same age, children could be in school, or in paid work, or married, or having their own child. Such multiple pathways make it difficult for parents to transfer traditional age-based societal norms. The unpredictability and multiplicity of transitions are also major challenges for the life-course perspective as applied to intergenerational relationships. A life-course perspective needs to adapt to such changing circumstances, using the type of longitudinal evidence on which this paper is based.

The Author

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About Young Lives

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty, following the lives of 12,000 children in 4 countries (Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam) over 15 years. **www.younglives.org.uk**

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1. Introduction

This paper explores relationships between caregivers and their children through the life-course perspective. Drawing on longitudinal data obtained from the Young Lives study in Ethiopia, the paper aims to contribute to the development of intergenerational theory.

Intergenerational relationship is the bond between generations of differing age ranges within the family. Family connections 'extend across the generations and serve to integrate the young and the old' (Elder 1998:6). Intergenerational theory investigates how these two generations are linked. Its main feature is an understanding of 'the combination of two people at different phases of development that will interact with each other, usually in a way involving others, in various situations and contexts, with the expectation of a relationship' (Vanderven 2011:30).

Family relationships can take different shapes. For example, from their study in some Ethiopian communities, Abebe and Aase established four types of extended family: first, 'rupturing' families, where the middle generation has died and grandparents and grandchildren are living together; second, 'transient' families, where households headed by women or grandparents or children live in difficult economic conditions; third, 'adaptive' households, who are able to maintain their family well and could be considered able and normal; and finally 'capable' families, in which caregivers can afford to maintain their dependants even in the absence of external support (Abebe and Aase 2007: 2064–5). The continuum of care as further developed by Abebe (2012) suggests that the collective family could involve elements of all the first three types of extended family.

Families are venues where values are transferred, and relationships are exhibited and negotiated. Relationships within the family serve as 'conduits by which values, resources, and behaviours are transmitted across … generations' (Putney and Bengston 2004: 158). All this happens within changing contexts, suggesting that relationships are neither static nor confined within the family. Comparing generations, we note a general consensus in the literature that relationships in the past were marked by the 'obedience' of the younger generation in relation to the 'authoritative' older generation. Drawing on her ethnographic work in Ethiopia, Poluha (2004) documented that parent–child relationships used to be more 'hierarchical'. Children were expected to be 'obedient and respectful' towards adults, who were expected to exercise control and supervision over their children (Poluha 2004: 67).

Today, however, children have increasingly been exposed to external influences, mainly through education, and consequently their relationships with their parents have been renegotiated. Socialisation, which inherently casts adults as socialisers and children as recipients, has gradually been challenged, giving place to 'negotiation' between generations. The intergenerational theory, considered as an 'emergent theory' (Vanderven 2011), endeavours to investigate intergenerational relationships in a changing world.

Understanding such changes over time requires investigation of intergenerational relationships through the life course, and that is the focus of this paper. In recent years, the concept of the life course has been increasingly applied to the understanding of the temporal aspects of intergenerational relationships. A life-course approach to intergenerational family research 'considers how family relationships change or remain stable across individual lives and families and how these processes are linked to multiple and evolving historical contexts' (Putney and Bengston 2004:157).

At the individual level, the life-course perspective underlines the events and decisions characteristic of earlier ages that have a persistent impact at a later age. At the macro level, it highlights how social changes generate different patterns of social change and personal biographies across the generations (George and Gold 1991). In a fast-changing world, relationships are becoming non-linear and dynamic, and a life-course study is broad enough to contain and integrate intergenerational study (Vanderven 2011). And the family is 'an ideal context for application of life course perspectives' (George and Gold 1991:68).

However, the emerging application of life-course theory to the study of intergenerational relationships faces a major challenge. As it strives to understand intergenerational relationships over time in changing contexts, longitudinal empirical evidence is needed. Nevertheless, this is rarely available. Arguing that 'life course analysis requires a dynamic, longitudinal perspective … for both population and individual studies', some authors indicate that unfortunately 'longitudinal data spanning long periods of time are very scarce' (George and Gold 1991:70). And the challenge is even greater in developing countries, where quantitative longitudinal data are scarce, as are researchers who can apply the life-course methods (Lloyd-Sherlock forthcoming). For instance, although there have been some studies of relationships between caregivers and their children in Ethiopia (for example, Poluha 2004 and Abebe and Aase 2007), they focused on specific cross-sectional qualitative data. Thus, 'the collection of case studies by intergenerational researchers could be a step in further advancing intergenerational theory' (Vanderven 2011: 24).

Here, the Young Lives study seems uniquely positioned to contribute to the debate. This paper, based on longitudinal qualitative and survey data, tries to investigate changing intergenerational relationships, using the life-course perspective. This perspective, which recognises the influence of the wider contexts of social changes, also helps us to understand human capacity in developing agency over time. This paper tries to show how social changes in Ethiopia have influenced relationships between caregivers and their children, and how parental socialisation to maintain the traditional adult supremacy is gradually being replaced by negotiations, resulting in the development of children's agency in the processes.

2. Data source and methods

This paper draws on data generated by the Young Lives household and child surveys as well as in-depth interviews which were part of the qualitative field work. The research questions aimed to establish four things: (1) the relationships between caregivers and their children; (2) mutual obligations and expectations across the generations; (3) changing relationships over time; and (4) how social changes influence the long tradition of parental control over children in Ethiopia, and how children develop their agency as a result. The purpose was to investigate how changes in the wider contexts affect family relationships – focusing on intergenerational relationships through the life-course perspective.

From the survey, descriptive statistics are used to establish the family structures, intergenerational educational levels, parental expectations, and parents' feelings towards their children. The data are drawn from about 999 children (the number changes between rounds because of attritions and missing responses) of the older cohort, born in 1994, and their caregivers from 20 sites located in five administrative regions (Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nationalities, Nations and People, SNNP, and Tigray) and Addis Ababa city in Ethiopia. Data were collected in 2002, 2006 and 2009. As a study of childhood poverty,

Young Lives has selected more poor households than the national average. In 2006, about 72 per cent of the households selected for the study were poor (living below the poverty line as calculated by the consumption of 2,200 kilo-calories per day per adult, plus essential non-food items), as opposed to the national figure of 39 per cent (Woldehanna et al. 2011).

The qualitative data were used to illustrate the real relationships between the caregivers and children as they were actually experienced, and some changes over the years. Statistical data from the survey are substantiated by using some cases from the in-depth interviews and longitudinal qualitative data. The data were collected in three rounds of field work (in 2007, 2008 and 2011) from 30 children (15 boys and 15 girls) and their caregivers. The respondents were selected (reflecting heterogeneity in terms of living areas, gender, religion, family structure, parental economic status, and other markers) from participants in the wider survey in the five sites (one from each region). Two sites are from urban areas (Bertukan in Addis Ababa and Leku in Hawassa, capital of the SNNP region) and three from rural areas (Tach-Meret in Amhara, Leki in Oromia and Zeytuni in Tigray).

Bertukan is a very poor neighbourhood located at the centre of Addis Ababa city, where people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds live together. Housing is very poor, and many live in overcrowded rooms. People earn a living from street stalls selling fruits and vegetables, or from manual labour, and some women engage in sex work, which exposes them to health problems such as HIV/AIDS. Many children in the area are born out of wedlock, and there are many female-headed households. Some young people engage in gambling, they use *Shisha* (hookah pipes), chew *chat,*[1] and are exposed to other risks. For girls there is the risk of harassment, early pregnancy and childbirth.

Leku is a poor area, the oldest neighbourhood located at the centre of Hawassa city. People from various ethnic groups, mainly from southern Ethiopia, live side by side. The fast-growing city is attracting many young migrants from the rural areas, a trend which results in worsening housing problems. As in the *Bertukan* site, there are widespread practices such as *Shisha* and chewing *chat,* and other addictive behaviour that exposes young people to risk.

Tach-Meret is a rural community in Amhara region where families from the Amhara ethnic group earn their living mainly through farming. The community is very close to a town, a factor which has helped community members to benefit from services such as roads, health care, schooling, and job opportunities. However, it also exposes children to risks created by video shows, bars, robbery, and other bad influences.

Leki is a community situated in the eastern part of *Oromia* Regional State. People in the area are predominantly Oromos, one of the largest ethnic groups in the country, and girls' early marriage (through either a formal wedding or abduction) is a common practice. Girls' marriage involves extensive bride-wealth transactions (livestock, money, clothing, etc.) given by the groom's family to the bride's family (see Boyden et al. 2012). In the community, farming, irrigation, fishing and animal husbandry are the major sources of livelihoods. There is one primary school in the community. Those who finish primary school have to move to the nearby town, an unaffordable requirement for many families. As a result, there are many children not in school beyond the primary level.[2]

1 *Chat* is a plant whose leaves are chewed by many as a strong stimulant.

2 Children usually start formal school at the age of 7 and are expected to finish eight years of primary school at the age of 15.

Zeytuni is a rural community in the Tigray region. It is a remote area with very limited connections to nearby towns. People in the community, who are Tegaru (Tigray ethnic group) and Orthodox Christians, earn their living through farming, subsidised by petty trading, wage work and some irrigation schemes. Students who finish primary school in the community have to travel to towns, but some leave school because their families cannot afford to support them in secondary education. For girls, it is a double problem because there are sex-related risks (rape, pregnancy and child bearing) when they lodge in towns to attend secondary school. Parents therefore usually prefer that they get married soon after they finish primary school. In this area, as in Tach-Meret, early marriage of girls is still practised but has gradually been declining. During wedding ceremonies, *gezmi* (dowry) is given by the bride's family to the groom's side, but it is used for setting up of the newly wed couple.

Many households in the rural communities cannot feed their families for the whole year. They depend on the Productive Safety Net Programme, which itself requires young people to work in order to get some support (see Tafere and Woldehanna 2012). Children from poor families are often engaged in income-generating activities such as picking haricot beans and selling stones (Tach-Meret), in work on private irrigation schemes (Leki) and as stone crushers (Zeytuni). These activities may negatively affect their schooling.

During our research interviews, parents were first asked to compare their own childhood with that of their children. The aim was to establish differential contexts for both generations. Second, parents and children were asked about their obligations towards and expectations of each other. Third, they were asked about their relationships and any changes taking place as the children grew older. The purpose was to explore the quality of relationships between caregivers and their children, and to establish the generational relationships, key transitions and negotiations. For children, we used a *life course draw-and-tell* tool. Children were asked to draw a timeline on which they indicated the 'happy' and 'sad' memories in their life. This technique was very useful in highlighting family matters such as illness, death, migration, conflicts or happy memories. Individual interviews further explored these issues, based on the children's drawings. The exercise helped to uncover what is important for children, and it initiated in-depth discussions.

Of course, asking parents and children about their relationship was not an easy task. We followed the Young Lives Ethical Guidelines, which require 'informed consent' to be sought, emphasising that respondents participate voluntarily and can withdraw from the session whenever they find it necessary.[3] Pseudonyms are used in reports and papers. As this was a longitudinal study, however, rapport was well established between the researchers and the respondents. We used the same researchers for five field-work phases (three core studies and two sub-studies were carried out between 2007 and 2011), and each researcher interviewed respondents of the same sex as himself or herself. For example, in some cases, it was some years before we were able to establish the actual nature of the relationship between the caregivers and children. In the previous rounds we did not push for answers, because some of the children were not really aware of their actual relationships to their caregivers. It was only in 2011 that we were able to establish the fact that some of the caregivers were not biological parents. In the process, we had some information from the caregivers, but we were not able to record it until the children knew about it and could confirm it to us.

3 For details of Young Lives Ethical Guidelines and practical applications, see Morrow (2009).

3. Results and discussion

In this section, I discuss the results. I focus on the relationship between caregivers and children, the basis of their relationships, changing relationships in the context of wider social changes, and the transition from socialisation to negotiations between generations.

3.1 Relationships between caregivers and children

The relationships between the caregivers and their children, established from the survey data, are presented in Table 1. The figures show diversified forms of relationship. Most children live with their biological parents. Some of them, however, live with other caregivers, including grandparents, a partner of their biological parent, or relatives. Over the years, the number of children living with biological parents has decreased. At the age of 15, about 15 per cent of the children no longer live with their biological parent(s). Similarly, with a slight increase between the rounds, the caregivers of about 15 per cent of the children have changed during all the three rounds.

Table 1. *Primary caregivers' relationship with children*

Primary caregiver	Round 1 N (%)	Round 2 N (%)	Round 3 N (%)
Biological parent	896 (89.7)	843 (86.2)	817 (85.0)
Grandparent(s)	53 (5.3)	47 (4.8)	40 (4.2)
Partner of biological parent	11 (1.1)	22 (2.3)	24 (2.5)
Uncle/aunt	13 (1.3)	19 (1.9)	32 (3.3)
Sibling(s)	10 (1.0)	20 (2.1)	22 (2.3)
Other	16 (1.6)	27 (2.8)	26 (2.7)
Total	**999 (100)**	**978 (100)**	**961 (100)**

The figures are much closer to the national data from the 2011 Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS), which shows that 19 per cent of Ethiopian children live with non-biological parents. The proportion of children living with both parents decreases with age. For example, younger children (aged 10–14) are more likely to live with both parents (65.7 per cent) than older children (aged 15–17), of whom only 54.1 per cent do so (CSA 2012). The reasons reported were death, illness, migration or divorce of biological parents, as well as migration by children themselves.

Among the 30 children included in the qualitative study, 21 were living with their biological parents. Six of them lived with their mothers because their fathers were dead or divorced. Another four lived with their grandparents, due to either death of their parents (2), or illness (1) or migration to town (1). The remaining five children were living with other relatives or friends of parents after their parents had either died or abandoned them in childhood, mainly because they were too poor to bring them up.

The role of grandparents in taking care of their grandchildren is significant. This shows a vertical family structure, with more than one generation involved in a household. In developing countries like Ethiopia, verticalisation could be due to the need for generations to help each other. In the context of poverty and where there are very limited numbers of external social-protection structures, family collective actions and interactions are necessary. The death of parents leaves children with the sole option of living with other relatives, mainly with surviving

grandparents. In Ethiopia, the family collective provides social security based on love, reciprocity and trust (Abebe 2008). The collective family could bring together members from a range of relationships: biological, fictive, religious, friendship, etc. (Abebe 2012).

Adults may have various reasons for taking responsibility for caring for non-biological children. Drawing on their empirical study in some communities in Ethiopia, Abebe and Aase claimed that some families may be motivated to host orphans because of what children can contribute. They argued that 'one of the factors that motivate families … to take in orphans, especially boys, is the immensely valuable labour contribution of children, which is required in agricultural and domestic activities' (Abebe and Aase 2007: 2066). This could be true in certain circumstances. But as caregivers usually assume responsibility for children from an early age, when the children rarely have the ability to contribute to the household, the motivation for caring seems more likely to be sympathy than expectation of some returns. For example, Young Lives interviews show that grandparents usually take on the responsibility of caring for children of their deceased children. A maternal grandmother from Bertukan, caring for two orphans, said: "Grandparents make efforts to care for their grandchildren more than their own. They have more affection for them than for their own children. When I see this anywhere, grandparents do love their grandchildren. They consider their grandchildren as a gift from God."

Another caregiver, grandmother of Miki, from the same site, said that "you become too sympathetic. I love him more than my own children. Particularly, when they come closer to you, your feelings are extreme and you become highly compassionate to them. After all, he is my own soul." Grandparents consider their grandchildren as the 'gift of God' because they are not immediately born to them. They feel very compassionate because grandchildren are replacements for their deceased children. They deem them as given by God.

Such diversified family structures, however, may have a differential impact on long-term intergenerational harmony. For some children, establishing the type of relationship that they have with their caregivers takes time. As they grow older, they may face the challenge of finding out that their caregivers are not their biological parents. Caregivers who take on the responsibility of raising non-biological children try to act as if they were biological parents. But over time, children want to understand the real relationship. During our qualitative field work, we found about five children who came to know the identity of their caregivers, and the whereabouts of their biological parents. For example, Netsa from Bertukan, at the age of 14, reported that she was assuming that her caregiver was *welajenat* (her 'biological mother') but later discovered that it was not the case. At the age of 16 the following conversation was conducted with her.

Interviewer: Is the woman you are living with *welajenatishnat* [your biological mother]?

Netsa: No! I don't know where my biological mother lives. I do not know whether she lives in one of the regions [of Ethiopia] or abroad.

Interviewer: Do you know the whereabouts of your father, either?

Netsa: No, I do not know. But I guess he lives somewhere in the regions.

Interviewer: Do you know how you came to live with your current caregiver?

Netsa: I was born in the same house where I live now.

Interviewer: What is the relationship between *welajenatish* and your current caregiver?

Netsa: I think they are somewhat related.

Interviewer: With whom do you prefer to live?

Netsa: I prefer to live with my current caregiver, because she is the one who tries to fulfil all my needs. She is the one paying for my education and everything else.

Interviewer: When did your mother leave you?

Netsa: I do not know!

Netsa, at the age of 16, knew her actual relationship with her caregiver. However, she has yet to establish the relationship between her caregiver and her biological mother, her lineage background and the whereabouts of her parents. Her caregiver, who used to claim that she was Netsa's mother in earlier field work, later confirmed that she was not the biological parent. She said:

> "Her mother is my relative. When she was living with me she gave birth to this child and ran away immediately after delivery. I brought the child up myself. Her father has never seen her but I guess he lives in the rural areas. … Sometimes her mother visits us but the girl did not know who she is. It was recently that I told her that she was her biological mother. She felt very sad and she does not want to talk about it again. When I tell her that I am not fertile, she says 'what I know is that you are my mother and I will remain as your child'. Nowadays, I am getting upset because of this."
>
> (Netsa's caregiver, Bertukan)

Non-biological parents find it hard to tell children about the actual bond, sometimes fearing that the knowledge might affect their relationships negatively. Netsa's mother stated that she waited for some time before she told the child the truth, because she feared that Netsa might not be happy. Even during the interview, she warned the interviewer that the child does not want other people to know about the relationship. In line with Young Lives ethical guidelines, the interviewer did not reveal this, and it was only after the child and the caregiver mentioned it that the fact was established. In the previous field work, it was recorded as a mother–child relationship.

For others, the relationships have gradually become difficult. For example, Genet's caregiver from Bertukan began to sense the difficulty of continuing to have good relationships with a non-biological child. She said: "Her mother died when she was 5 years old, her father died when she was 7. We brought her up with our children. But nowadays, she looks for her blood relatives. She has begun spending the summer vacation with her relatives although they do not support her!" Genet's father was a friend and colleague of her caregiver. The woman is not happy with Genet, and she has reported that some misunderstandings are developing with her husband because of the girl's disobedience. The man wants to tolerate Genet until she finishes school, but his wife seems to have run out of patience and she is expecting that there may be conflict in their marriage in the near future. Genet herself did not report any mistreatment by her caregiver, but said that she now prefers to go to church every weekend and does not want to stay at home unless necessary.

In general, this indicates how caregivers and children establish relationships. In some cases, as they grow older, children get to know who their caregivers really are and they re-establish their relationships. Caregivers tend to reveal the secrets of their relationship. For some it has become a time of re-establishing relationships, and for others a cause of contention. The life-course perspective helped to establish intergenerational relationships that take different forms over the course of the life of both generations. For example, in the *life course draw-*

and-tell exercise children depicted when their parents died, migrated, or divorced, and how it affected their life over time.

As children grow and are exposed to the external world, their relationships with caregivers are affected. This is discussed in the next section.

3.2 Intergenerational obligations and expectations

The familial relation dominates the relationship between generations. However, at later stages relationships may also be negotiated. Both generations enter into some implicit understanding of each other's 'expectations and obligations'. Over the course of their life, each generation has certain needs that could be fulfilled by the other.

When their children were aged 12, parents were asked their expectations of their children when they grow up. As indicated in Table 2, almost all parents expected to get financial assistance, emotional support and care when they become old. With slight variations, expectations of support in old ages were strong.

Table 2. *Caregivers' expectations of grown-up children (%)*

Do you expect your child to provide support when grown up?	Financial assistance N=980	Emotional support N=980	Care when getting old N=980
Not at all	2.1	4.3	1.7
A little	5.5	3.7	2.2
Somewhat	18.6	12.2	8.8
Quite a lot	34.6	31.3	29.5
A lot	38.7	48.1	57.0
NK	0.5	0.4	0.6
Total	100	100	100

Source: Young Lives Round 2 survey

The qualitative evidence illustrates the *expectations* and the *obligations* that the two generations owe to each other. Caregivers stated their own obligations towards and expectations of their children. Miki's grandmother from Bertukan stated that she has an obligation to provide her grandson with necessary things because he is *ye-akalekifay* (part of my body or blood). She said that she is the closest person with responsibility for standing up for the child after her son (Miki's father) became mentally ill and his mother ran away. Miki's grandmother expects that he could help her when she gets old, but she is more concerned about his life. She says: "If he has a better future after completing his education, I hope he will help me till I die. … [But] I may die before he reaches that stage." Defar's father from the Tach-Meret site affirms: "We take care of our children because we are *welajoch* (biological parents)." Their obligations emanate from the fact that they are 'biological' parents and have 'blood' relationships.

Generally, parents felt obliged to raise their children properly by providing them with food, clothing and other essentials and by sending them to school. Parenthood carries obligations to advise, guide, discipline and control children who may 'not know what is good and bad'. Caregivers desire to ensure that their children grow properly and they give support as far as

they can while they are alive. Bereket's grandmother says: "I advise my grandchildren to work hard before the ladder is broken down."[4]

Support may continue until the child becomes 'self-reliant', although there was little reference to the specific age when children can provide for themselves (*rasmechal*). The age of self-reliance was explained in terms of finishing school, having a job, or getting married. But for many, 'age' does little to mark transitions. A caregiver from Bertukan said: "In Ethiopia there is no definite age that children could become independent. The age of 18 does not work." Haymanot's mother, from Zeytuni, for example, felt that it was her responsibility to 'find a husband' for her daughter even before her daughter reaches the age of 18 (see details of this case in section 3.4). Children could expect parental support even after the age of 18. In return, parents expect some economic support, affection, and protection from grown-up children. Yordi's mother from Leku says: "If I help my daughter to finish university, she will support me financially." All expressed their hopes that when their children become self-sufficient, they (the parents) will get all the support that they need. Parents may invest care with some expectations of reciprocity, but more importantly they consider it as a norm that grown-up children help their old parents. It is not a social contract between generations, but a societal norm that is taken for granted.

On the other hand, children stated that it is the parents' obligation to raise their children *betegebiw* ('properly)' by providing food and clothing and by sending them to school. Some also stated that they expect affection and some advice from their parents. Mihretu, from Zeytuni, interviewed when he was 13, established his own and his parents' obligations as follows.

Interviewer: What do you expect from your parents?

Mihretu: They should buy me exercise books, clothes and shoes.

Interviewer: Until when are they going to support you?

Mihretu: Until I finish my education.

Interviewer: What do your parents expect from you?

Mihretu: To support them financially.

Interviewer: What are you going to do for your parents?

Mihretu: I will give them my salary in the future.

Children felt that they had filial obligations to provide support in return for their parents' care. Economic support is expected of them when they become self-reliant. However, children reported that they were actually expected (or felt obliged) to help struggling families in their own capacity even before they finished school or established themselves. For instance, the survey data indicate that at the age of 15 on a typical weekday a child spends on average nearly five-and-a-half hours in school but nearly six hours in different types of work (Woldehanna et al. 2011). All children included in the qualitative study do some type of activity that supports the family. Half of them were engaged in paid work to subsidise their family and themselves. Some had to leave school to fulfil such obligations. One example from Leki illustrates different views of the caregiver and the child. The aunt describes her obligations, but the child accuses her caregivers of failing to fulfil their obligation.

4 The grandmother is representing herself as a ladder that her children can use until she dies.

> "I buy her educational materials such as notebooks and pens. I want her to be well established before I die. I want her to be educated. I don't want her to be married, no! A married woman is like someone who goes to a prison. I want her to be educated and reach at a good level."
>
> (Beletech's aunt)

> "When I ask my caregivers for clothing and school materials, they say, 'we don't have any money'. I buy my clothes by doing paid work [in private irrigated fields]. …They just expect me to get married and earn them bride wealth. They don't care if I learn or not. I wake up early in the morning, clean the house, cook food, and take out the cows [to herders] and go to school."
>
> (Beletech)

Beletech, an orphan girl, was expected to do all types of work in order to contribute to the family income, and she met the cost of her own clothing. Although her caregivers felt an obligation to provide everything, their words remain as a simple expression of the norm rather than a statement of actual practice. She feels that they are rather abusing her.

Here, there appears a 'shortfall' between norms and practice: between parents' normative obligations and children's expectations of their parents, on the one hand, and what is supplied to and expected from children on the other hand. Parents reported that they were obliged to provide their children with necessary things until they become 'self-reliant'. But children reported that they were not getting what they were expecting. In practice, they were obliged to help themselves and their parents from an early age. Two possible conclusions could be drawn from this. First, both parents and children know their obligations in theory, but poverty has made it very difficult to apply them. Second, despite failure in matching the norms, strong intergenerational relationships still persist, suggesting that the underlying basis of the relationships lies beyond economic reciprocity. *Expectation* is what one generation hopes to get from the other; *obligation* is what one generation feels responsible for providing to the other. However, unlike a purely economic transaction, where reciprocity is expected, intergenerational support is cemented by more solid familial bonds, mainly blood ties.

Parents and children have different experiences of the changing world. Such changes obviously have impacts on their relationships, as discussed below.

3.3 Social changes and intergenerational relationships

Parent–child relationships operate in certain contexts, which largely affect how the two generations interact with each other. Intergenerational theory investigates not only how two generations are linked but also how the varied contexts influence their relationships. In other words, 'broad social structures and large social contexts affect family life and relationships' (Putney and Bengston 2004:157). The influences are most apparent in key life transitions (Kaufman and Uhlenberg 1998). Here, schooling and early marriage of rural girls are taken as examples of the way in which wider social structures and social changes affect intergenerational relationships.

Education provides varied opportunities for both parents and children. As a means of modernisation, education has been expanded in Ethiopia over the last two decades. For the study children who were born in the mid-1990, their school ages coincided with the expansion of schools in Ethiopia. As an important family investment, parents responded to the expansion of education by sending their children to school. The differential outcome is so

significant that the data from Round 3 (see Table 3) indicate that nearly all children have been to school, as opposed to just one third of their parents. During their childhood, approximately 15 per cent of parents had religious or informal education, whereas for their children education has been transformed largely into formal or 'modern' schooling.

Table 3. *Educational levels of caregivers and children, at the age of 15 (%)*

Educational level	Caregiver			Child		
	Urban *N=390*	Rural *N=580*	Total *N=970*	Urban *N=390*	Rural *N=580*	Total *N=970*
No education	10.2	37.9	48.1	0.2	2.1	2.3
Religious and/or informal education	5.9	9.7	15.6	-	0.2	0.1
Grade 1–4	8.4	7.3)	15.7	5.2	22.2	27.4
Grade 5–8	9.2	3.9	13.1	32.0	34.6	66.6
Secondary school	6.6	0.9	7.5	2.9	1.0	3.9
Total	40.2	59.8	100	40.2	59.8	100

In their own childhood, most parents in the study had no opportunity to attend school, and their parents were not expected to send them to school. They felt their duty was to raise them and then to see them well married. But as time changes, ensuring that children attend school has become a new parental obligation and of course has changed children's expectations of their parents.

Moreover, during the parent's childhood, religious education supported the family socialisation process. *Ye kestimhirt* (literally, priest education) among the Orthodox Christians, besides its spiritual teachings, advocates the transfer of religious and parental values to children. Priests teach young children to obey their parents. In general, the religious institutions were supportive of parental effort to shape their children 'like themselves'. Before the expansion of formal schooling, *Ye kestimhirt* was widespread in the northern part of the country (including Tigray and Amhara regions) and later spread southwards. Besides the main teaching of religion, priests taught alphabets (*Ge'ez*) and numbers. Those who received priest education could read and write and obtain work in some offices. Some might eventually become deacons and then priests. Such teaching also had the purpose of transferring the norms of gerontocracy for generations.

The transformation of education from religious and informal to modern schooling has brought a significant change in the relationship between parents and children. Through formal education, children began to be exposed to broader and more influential external experiences. Parents who participated in the qualitative research interviews described how their relationships with their children differed from their own childhood experiences, particularly in relation to respect, obedience and freedom. An illustrative example, offered by a mother from Leki, provides an insight. She compares the childhood of the two generations as follows:

> "In the past, children strictly obeyed their parents. But these days, children can also do whatever they want. Moreover, children in the previous time have much respect for their parents and their elders, these days, only few children do …This time, children have relative freedom to decide on their own issues than the children of my childhood time. In the previous time, the parents have full control over their children. The children cannot go out without the permission of their parents. But this time, children can move without asking any permission from their parents. If parents try to control them, they may leave the family forever and go somewhere without the parental approval."
>
> (Hassen's mother, Leki, 2011)

These days, the older generation believes that some children are becoming disrespectful and disobedient. In the past, those who misbehaved were subjected to harsh punishment, but these days there is less physical punishment. Sefinesh's grandmother, aged 70, from Tach-Meret, says: "Before, children were beaten having their hands tied together with the pillar. Now, they are not tied up or beaten." A father from the same site confirms: "In our time, we were punished and strictly controlled by our parents. Now, parents don't have much control over their children." Children were not allowed to go their own way, but now they can make their own decisions, irrespective of their parents' interests. Children can agree with their parents' views "as far as it benefits them" (Hassen's mother).

At present, children seem to be wiser than were their parents. "Children in our time were innocent, obedient … punished if they make mistakes … These days, children refuse to do things beyond their capacity … they know what is good or bad for them … they are not beaten" (Mulu's mother, Tach-Meret). Parents recognise the role of formal schooling in producing such changes of behaviour between generations. A grandmother said: "Children are learning to be able to know what is important for them and to make their own decisions." Thus, while parents still believe that investing in their children's schooling is important and timely, they recognise that one of the results is the loss of control over them.

Another area of change that has affected intergenerational relationships is girls' early marriage. Societal norms of marriage were actualised through families, who traditionally had control over the practice. However, following global advocacy for children's rights and the Ethiopian government's adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999), early marriage is now considered to be a harmful practice, and legal sanctions and advocacy measures have been put in place. While the CRC required States to 'take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children' (Art 24, Para 3, UN CRC), the African Charter clearly declares that any 'child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory' (Article 21, Para 2).

Accordingly, the Ethiopian Federal Constitution (1995) prohibits laws, customs and practices that subjugate or cause bodily or mental harm to women. The 1997 Federal Cultural policy states that harmful traditional practices, mainly female early marriage and circumcision, should be abolished. The Revised Family Proclamation of 2000 Article 7 prohibits marriage under the age of 18, and the Criminal Code of 2005 prescribes penalties for such practices.

The legal sanctions and campaigns seem to have brought some positive results. For instance, the EDHS data show that among women aged 25 to 49, 63 per cent were married by the age of 18, and 77 per cent were married by the age of 20. The median age at first marriage among women aged 25 to 49 is 16.5 years, a slight increase from the 16.1 years reported in the 2005 EDHS. The proportion of women married by the age of 15 has declined over time, from 39 per cent among women currently aged 45 to 49 to 8 per cent among women currently aged 15 to 19 (CSA 2012: 63).

Such changes are gradually challenging the long tradition of marrying off girls before the age of 18. Parents believe that arranging marriages for their children at the age that they feel 'appropriate' is their obligation. Parents arrange and finance the marriage and also provide the essentials for the couple to start their independent life. While many parents still want to have full control of the marriage of their daughters, the timing has become a source of contest. For example, Genet, 17, an orphan from Bertukan, said: "My caregivers cannot force

me to marry. I will not accept. I will marry when I will be 30 years old." Another grandmother described disagreement with her granddaughter as follows:

> "I got married at her age, 14. It was common to take the bride without thinking wisely; we didn't even think what would come in the future. We simply agree with our parents to go to the groom's home and we begin to suffer … When I tell my 14-year-old granddaughter to marry, she gets angry and threatens to report to authorities. Children of the day are very wise."
>
> (Haftey's grandmother, Zeytuni, 2008)

This was also evident across the sites. Biritu's mother from Leki says: "Our parents used to give us to somebody we do not know and collect their bride wealth … they cover our head with shawl and put us on the horseback to ride us to groom's house … it was like sending us into a prison … Now, if I marry off my daughter out of her interest, she will refuse and oblige me to pay back any bride wealth I take." For mothers who were forced by their parents to marry someone whom they did not know, marriage was like going to prison, and they do not want their daughters to experience similar sufferings.

Parents stated that during their childhood the couple had a very limited role in the arrangement of the marriage. But nowadays, boys and girls have opportunities (for example in schools, work places, and neighbourhoods) to get to know each other and make their own decision about marriage; then they may inform their parents. There is a growing tendency for parents to gradually lose control over their children's marriage decisions.

The challenging experiences of early marriage and risks associated with late marriage puzzle families and may lead to intergenerational conflict. For example, a three-generation experience has provoked tensions within a family in Tach-Meret. The caregiver, a grandmother of Sefinesh, was herself married at the age of 13. Her daughter was also forced by her father (Sefinesh's grandfather) to quit school and get married at an early age to someone whom she did not know. She was divorced twice and finally had to run away to Addis Ababa to work as a maid, leaving behind her two daughters with her parents. She had a very serious conflict with her father and she warned him not to marry off her daughters before they finished school. The father, who preferred to avoid further conflict with his daughter, refrained from doing so. However, one of the girls (the elder sister of Sefinesh) started a sexual relationship with her boyfriend and had a baby. Her education has been interrupted and she is staying at home. Her grandfather was so angry that he initially refused to allow her to live in his house, but later he accepted the situation. Although the boyfriend has accepted the child as his own, he cannot provide any financial support because he is a student and has no income. The grandmother is also worried because Sefinesh has started a relationship with another boy and may have a child soon. The grandmother says:

> "If their mother hears this, she will be mad … [But] it was herself who ordered us not to marry them off. She repeatedly warned us not to marry them off on grounds of her own experiences. She says 'do not repeat problems I faced on my children!'"
>
> (Sefinesh's grandmother, 2011, Tach-Meret)

The grandparents are puzzled because they have two contradicting experiences. First, their daughter's early marriage was not successful and it has affected her education and forced her to leave her children with her parents. Second, avoiding early marriage may have unintended consequences, including early sexual relationships and childbirth out of wedlock,

which is causing family humiliation and life challenges. Ultimately, the grandparents are forced to take care of three generations, and relationships have increasingly been damaged.

In general, some parents accept children's right to make their own decisions. Nevertheless, many still fear that unlimited freedom is increasingly exposing them to more life risks and sometimes causing family disgrace. As a result, parents are invoking intergenerational dialogue to find a compromise between 'excessive' parental controls and 'unlimited' children's rights. This is discussed in the next section.

3.4 From socialisation to negotiation

Older generations usually want to socialise the younger generations so that there is an intergenerational continuity of relationships and reproduction of their childhood values. However, in the context of rapid social change, socialisation becomes a challenge. Parents experiencing some of the negative effects of social change want to bring up their children in what they feel are 'safe' pathways. These days, 'people live in a society where many if not all aspects of life and decision-making involve taking risks, facing dangers' (Mayall 2002: 61). Poverty and health risks are still among the major life challenges for present generations.

For poor families, sending children to do paid work outside the home is a common practice. About half of the children included in the qualitative study have been doing some paid work to subsidise their family and themselves. A negative consequence has been that children are increasingly exposed to risks. Parents have complained that girls, rarely allowed to do wage work in their childhood, have increasingly been engaged in paid work. That opens the way for friendship with boys, with the attendant possibility of initiating early sexual relations, having children out of wedlock and being exposed to health problems.

The health problems are so serious that young people's lives could be at risk. "We grew up without serious health problems. Nowadays, young people are worried about diseases" (a mother from Bertukan). "In our time, people drink, eat and enjoy but the only sex-related risk was venereal diseases. Now, there is HIV/AIDS which takes lives" (grandmother, Bertukan). Although schools provide education on reproductive health and sex-related issues, and better health-care systems are in place, some of the diseases are too difficult to cure. In the past, there were minor health problems, but nowadays people may contract many types of illness, some of which are incurable. In the urban study sites, some of the orphans who were brought up by grandparents or other caregivers associated the deaths of their parents with the widespread presence of diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

In such circumstances, parents argue for increased control over their children, fearing otherwise an uncertain future. Hassen's mother from Leki says: "If children do not accept the advice of their parents and elders, they will not have a good future." Because of their inherent obligations, parents feel that they should guide their children so that they grow up as well-behaved young people.

Overall, parents seem to be proud of their children (see Table 4). But their confidence to say that they are 'proud of their children' tends to decline as the children grow up. When their children were aged 12, most of them strongly agreed that they were proud of their children; but three years later they simply 'agree' – but not so 'strongly'.

Table 4. *Caregivers' pride in their children (%)*

I feel proud of my children	2006 N=980	2009 N=973
Strongly agree	79.4	42.9
Agree	14.1	43.6
Disagree	1.8	4.4
Strongly disagree	3.5	3.0
More or less	-	4.2
NK	1.2	2.0
Total	100	100

This suggests that relationships between parents and children tend to be affected over time. A grandmother who reported in earlier field work that her grandson, Bereket, was obedient and shared her aspirations, said later that he turned out to be different at the age of 17 and began to annoy her. She says:

> "These days children became familiar with money and do not listen when they are advised. They are now behaving wrongly. They collaborate and work with their older friends. I am getting extremely angry. If I had high blood pressure, I would have died away. It would have been better had he listened to me … I want him to abandon them [his friends] and focus on his education so that he will be successful. I don't want him to be careless and go with bad friends who chew *chat* … He is saying, 'I know what is relevant for me'. They ignore what we say and consider it as useless. They say, 'you have already gone through your time and that could never happen again'. It could be better if they say, 'yes' and listen to their mother and pray to God to give them longer life like their parents … In the past, children looked dirty but lived longer, whereas the current ones are wearing white clothes but get lost at an early age."
>
> (Bereket's grandmother, Bertukan site)

Bereket, after becoming engaged in a car-washing business, no longer shares his grandmother's aspirations for him to go to university and become a pilot or an engineer. He says:

> "Like any family, they want me to be a better person. My grandmother wants me to be successful in my education but I want to engage myself in a business … If they give me a better idea, I would consider it but if I don't believe in it I don't agree even if they are older than me. For example, I don't agree with my family regarding education. My interest is to quit school and concentrate on my work. However, my family wants me to focus on my studies which I don't accept it."

This example illustrates some of the tensions between generations that are emerging as children grow older. While the grandmother wants the child to distance himself from risky 'bad' friends and focus on his education, the boy wants to have friends who can help him in his business, and he no longer sees his future as dependent on schooling. He is actively working towards achieving his own interest, quite different from what his grandmother wanted.

Such cases are emerging as challenges to traditional developmental psychologists' view of socialisation. For them, parental influence on child outcomes is imperative, because relationships are grounded in family socialisations, with the parent–child emotional bond having a strong effect on intergenerational transmission processes (Putney and Bengston 2004). Such claims, however, are challenged by some exponents of the sociology of

childhood (Qvortrup 2000 and James 2007, who have argued for recognition of the agency of children). As opposed to developmental psychology, which considers children as 'becoming adults' and inferior to adults in all respects, it is argued that children have 'voice' on things essential for their lives (Clark 2005: 30). And the life-course perspective provides a useful tool to understand children's demonstrations of their agency over time. As they grow older, young people become increasingly exposed to other influences, and parents enter into a competition with other socialising agents. As they grow up, children become influenced by peers, teachers, school environments, and other networks of social relationships (Settersten 2002; Elder 1998).

Social changes, particularly the expansion of education, have provided children with socialising options other than the influence of their family. A mother from Zeytuni compares her own experience with that of her daughter by saying: "This time, because of education, my daughter knows a lot. In the past, it was our parents who were making decisions for us. Now, we may advise them, but they decide on what is important for them." A grandmother from the same site says: "My granddaughter nowadays teaches me about health … She tells me that circumcision is wrong … All this is due [to] her knowledge she got from school."

The main outcome of the competition between various agents of socialisation is that socialisation itself is increasingly changing: from the traditional 'one direction' style, with parents dictating behaviour, to more 'reciprocal' relationships. Criticising the traditional model of socialisation, which assumes a one-directional transfer of values (mainly from adults), Settersten argues that where families consist of different cohorts it is difficult to undermine the role of one or the other generation (Settersten 2002: 34). The fact that each participant in the relationship is affected by the other participant confirms that 'one of the key features of intergenerational theory is the recognition that relationships are reciprocal' (Vanderven 2004: 87). Parents in the study stated that nowadays the influence of children on parents is increasing. So socialisation has become a two-way process in which the 'socialiser' of the old days and the 'socialised' of the new days influence each other (ibid.). Through the development of reciprocal relationships, the traditional parent–child association as 'giver–recipient' is becoming altered. In Africa, even the most vulnerable children, including orphans and the poor, have increasingly made important contributions to poor families. Instead of children being viewed as 'victims' requiring 'care', they are rather considered as 'agents', a phenomenon which requires a new look at childhood (Abebe 2012; Meintjes and Giese 2006; Kesby et al. 2006). As they grow older, children's agency is clearly signified within intergenerational relationships.

Negotiations between generations come to the fore when grown-up children experience key life transitions. Young people, influenced by fast-changing social contexts, want to exercise their freedom to make their own decisions. However, parents usually envisage some risks in allowing such freedom to their children. Believing their children to be incapable of making some decisions, they feel responsible for advising and guiding them.

> "Parents have a responsibility to give care and advice to their children. If the child is not listening to his parent's advice, he would be exposed to risky situations and perhaps loss of life. He may face lots of problems. The present situation is not good and I am so worried about it."
>
> (Miki's grandmother, Bertukan)

Settersten argues: 'since adults have many years of experience behind them, they may be more resistant to change and attempts at socialization and re-socialization' (Settersten 2002:

22). After going through their own experiences of childhood, parents want to share what is good for their children. A typical example is given by Netsa's caregiver from Bertukan, who claimed to have missed a good opportunity because she did not listen to advice.

Interviewer: What do you feel about your childhood?

Caregiver: I wouldn't have been like what I am if I were educated. I could have been in good position by now. I share this experience with my daughter.

Interviewer: What do you tell her, for instance?

Caregiver: I tell her that my friends of that time are now in good position, but I am not. This is because I couldn't continue my education. She asks me why, and I tell her that it was my fault. I had friends who behaved badly. I tell her so that she doesn't repeat it.

Interviewer: What other experience do you tell her?

Caregiver: Many things! For example, I tell her not to go with boys because they may cheat her. Of course, all boyfriends are not bad. I, for example, had many good boyfriends who could lead me to good things. When I remember it now, I regret that I haven't accepted what they were advising me. I didn't mind by that time because my mother had enough money for me.

Children may feel discontent at being socialised for roles that are not appropriate to their time, and they may be 'disobedient'. One way of socialising children is by communicating societal norms that govern age-based practices. 'Age norms are prescriptions for, or proscriptions against, engaging in certain behaviours and taking on certain roles at particular ages' (Settersten 2002:18). Adults make their children aware of the societal norms that should be respected, corresponding to the children's life-course stages.

Parental expectations of early marriage for girls, for instance, could be irrelevant in the modern context, where education takes precedence over marriage in terms of time. Thus the early marriage of girls, especially in rural areas, has become a source of contests and negotiations between generations. Two stories illustrate this: one in which a smooth transfer away from tradition was achieved, and the other in which, after initial conflict, consensus was reached through renegotiation.

In 2010, Haymanot, from Zeytuni, 16 at that time, was married in a family-arranged wedding to someone with whom she was well acquainted. As her family was so poor, her in-laws did not expect any dowry (although this is the long-established cultural practice in the community and among the Tegaru in the region). Haymanot says: "I am happy about my marriage because it was arranged by my parents and I stopped doing paid work since marriage." Her parents have convinced her that, in the context of poverty and sex-related illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, she does not have any better option than to get married. Her mother says: "My daughter was working in a crusher plant[5] for wages. She had male colleagues; I used to worry that they may rape her or beat her if she refuses. Therefore, I believe that it is better in the community to marry off a daughter as early as possible." Although she has discontinued her education due to marriage, the intergenerational relationship has continued smoothly, with the married daughter helping her mother financially and paying her regular visits, as they live in the same neighbourhood.

5 There are private gravel-making plants where young people like Haymanot earn money by carrying stones from the nearby quarry to supply the crushing machine.

The second story concerns Ayu, from Leki, who was married in the same year and at the same age as Haymanot, but with a different arrangement. Ayu's parents wanted their daughter's marriage to be conducted according to the traditional norms: arranged by the parents of the couple, with respect for all clan and family powers and the payment of due bride wealth (money and other gifts given by the groom's family to the bride's family). However, Ayu and her husband opted for 'voluntary abduction', whereby she was reportedly abducted by her husband but later confirmed that she was a willing party to the event. The family was not happy about the process, because such elopement was against the normative way of marriage in the community, and among the Oromo culture at large.

The conflict continued for a while until the newly married couple found a way of reconstituting the relationship by making 'reconciliatory' bride-wealth payments. They provided blankets, clothing, drinks and some cash for her parents. Although much less than the normal payment (which would consist of several livestock, cash, clothing, jewellery, etc.), some form of bride wealth (*gabara*) was still paid, indicating that the tradition was still respected in some ways. Nevertheless, further bride wealth (in cash or cattle) is expected before the marriage is 'formalised' (locally called *seerrakutuu)* according to traditional norms through a formal wedding. This had not been completed by the time of our field work, because the husband had to work and save the necessary sum of money. This story indicates that parents' control over the marriage of their daughter was initially disrupted, but the interests of the girl were somehow accommodated. Eventually, however, renegotiations between the child and parents have compromised the daughter's interests. Such negotiation mends relationships and ensures the continuation of long-term ties between parents and children, even after the child has reached adulthood.

These examples suggest that intergenerational relationships in the context of social change need negotiation. Settersten argues that 'family relationships continue over time but require re-negotiation as individuals assume new roles within or outside the family or as those relationships need to be renewed or reinvented over time' (Settersten 2002: 22). Negotiation requires partly altering the traditional setting in order to accommodate the interests of both generations. To ease the intergenerational tension in relation to the age of marriage, parents tend to suggest that the contested age should be negotiated. For instance, Mesih's mother from Zeytuni says:

> "I was married at the age of 15. It seems a bit too early because it may expose to problems. The current age of 18 is too late, particularly to the priests. At the age of 18, girls may not be virgin and priests could not marry them. So it is good if the age of marriage of a girl is set to 15."

One argument that parents use to convince their daughters to engage in early marriage is religious. Among Orthodox Christians, mainly in the Amhara and Tigray communities, it is a norm that a deacon or a priest can marry a girl only if she is a virgin. And as girls are increasingly losing their virginity before marriage, parents want to marry them off at an early age to avoid humiliation. This is a genuine concern, because among women aged 25–49, about 29 per cent reported having sexual intercourse before the age of 15, and 62 per cent before the age of 18 (CSA 2012). It is argued that to avoid risks associated with early sex and pregnancy, the age of marriage should be reduced from 18 to 16. This challenges the policy of the Ethiopian government, which is adopted from the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, stipulating the minimum age of marriage for girls to be 18. This seems, however, a logical argument, because the median age at first sexual intercourse for women aged 25 to 49 years is 16.6 years, which is very close to the median age at first

marriage (16.5 years), suggesting that Ethiopian women generally begin sexual intercourse at the time of their first marriage (CSA 2012).

In general, social changes increasingly affect intergenerational relationships; but as both generations maintain a strong bond, they continue to ease the tension through negotiations. One important outcome of such changes is the transformation of relationships from being based on traditional socialisation, whereby norms and practices have been simply transmitted across generations, to negotiated relationships in which both generations have a voice.

4. Changing intergenerational relationships and challenges for the life-course perspective

Parents and children, although living together, may experience the world differently. The life-course perspective provides tools to establish the link between generations and their different contexts. Elder argues that 'historical events and individual experience are connected through the family and the "linked" fates of its members' (Elder 1998:3).

The life course remains an important tool for the understanding of intergenerational relationships. As indicated in this paper, family relationships begin with very close bonds whereby all care comes from parents; this phase is followed by more explicit familial obligations and expectations, with children also beginning to establish their own filial obligations. But as key life transitions begin at later ages, intergenerational disagreements develop, leading to negotiations. The qualitative evidence indicates that, at the age of 13, children and their parents reported having smooth relationships, but data from later field work show some orphans and caregivers, including grandparents, complaining about each other. At the age of 17, key life transitions such as early marriage or work transitions have become causes of conflicts and negotiations, with young people sometimes challenging the authority of parents and societal norms.

However, the same data suggest that there are some challenges in applying the life-course perspective to enable an understanding of the quality of intergenerational relationships. Rapid social change, mainly due to the expansion of formal education and the discourses of children's rights, transmitted through schools and the media, have exposed young people to experiences different from those of their parents. For parents who usually prefer to transfer their parental values, and for children wanting to reflect the changes, the tension is obvious. As life transitions become increasingly unpredictable, generational gaps lead to intergenerational negotiation.

When parents themselves were children, strong traditional norms governed key life transitions, which were, therefore, more predictable. Over time, however, 'family transitions that once were predictable markers of entry into adulthood have become less predictable' (George and Gold 1991: 82). These days, they are becoming increasingly fluid and volatile. As indicated in this paper, if girls spend more of their time in school, their marriages may be delayed, or they may enter into sexual relationships with male partners, resulting in having a

child before marriage, or even leaving school. Such unpredictability of transitions creates conflicts between generations.

Moreover, there could be multiple transitions, where children had to pass through different pathways at the same time. For example, poor young people could be obliged to go to school, become engaged in paid work and, if they are rural girls, soon get married (see the examples of Ayu and Haymanot).

Obligations and expectations, cementing generations together, have been largely based on the assumption that children would pursue traditional societal norms and adopt parental practices. However, following rapid social changes and the prevalence of poverty, rigid norms are being challenged, and so are intergenerational relationships. As argued in this paper, parents assume the responsibility of helping their children until they finish school, and they expect returns any time after that. But because of poverty, such outcomes may not materialise. On the other hand, young people may interrupt school, refuse to get married, or take on paid work. This confuses parents: when does their children's childhood end? When do the parents' obligations terminate? When can they expect support from their children? Multiple life transitions mean that younger children could actually help their parents before finishing school, or they could end up in a marriage without any chance of providing their parents with the support that they require when they grow old.

Unpredictability and multiple pathways are, therefore, major challenges for the life-course perspective, which has been good at following distinct and linear life transitions. Such challenges have already been noted by some exponents in the field (e.g. Vanderven 2004, 2011; George and Gold 1991) who tried to develop the application of the life course in the understanding of intergenerational relationships. Despite being increasingly challenged by the heterogeneity and complexities of key transitions, the life course still remains an important tool for the understanding of intergenerational relationships. It catches changing intergenerational relationships over time by giving attention to social, historical and personal contexts producing the variability across generations (George and Gold 1991).

5. Conclusions

When children are young, parent–child relations imply neither parental expectations nor filial obligations; but over time, some implicit understandings develop. While parents feel that they have an obligation to provide necessary things until their children become adults, children in return feel that they have an obligation to support their parents when they are old. Moreover, parents feel that they are obliged to guide their children so that they achieve a better life in adulthood. However, with the expansion of modern education and young people's exposure to different experiences outside the family, many of them surpass their parents' expectations. In Ethiopia, where elders and parents enjoyed a form of gerontocracy for generations, parents desire to 'reproduce' their own childhood, while children want to have a new kind of childhood which reflects modern times. As social changes have brought both positive and negative experiences, intergenerational relationships become contested, and both generations enter into dialogue. Within the environment of ambivalent social changes, parents want to be more protective, whereas children – despite the risks – tend to exercise their 'freedom'. Parents may need the continuity of cultural norms, but children demand transformation into the future. Recognising the fact that their own childhood has limited relevance to their own children, parents become willing to listen to their children. That leads

to negotiations with reciprocal influences. Overall, nevertheless, this study has shown that parents generally tend to maintain their authority over the younger generation.

Although children are increasingly influenced by external circumstances, they still remain connected with their parents, who brought them up in very difficult economic circumstances. They believe that it is their filial duty to pay back what they have obtained from their parents, not just in terms of material benefits but in terms of care, affection and guidance. They still maintain that a good child is one who helps his/her parents – a value acquired from their parents through traditional socialisation processes. Thus in Ethiopia children remain strongly attached to their families. In the absence of external support (from the government or others), both generations remain the main source of security for each other, a fact which cements the strong relationship over generations.

On the other hand, as a result of rapid social change, relationships between parents and children are becoming more complicated and unpredictable, involving multi-linear life transitions. Researchers noted the challenge of adopting a single perspective on such complex relationships, such as those interpretations advocated by intergenerational theory and the life-course perspective. And 'if rates of social change continue to escalate, it may become more difficult to incorporate the resulting diversity of transitions and trajectories under the umbrella of a single concept such as the life course' (George and Gold 1991: 71–2). Yet, I argue that the life-course perspective remains a strong tool for documenting any change in the nature of the relationships as influenced by individuals, family or other external factors. The life course establishes the importance of understanding intergenerational relationships within the changing context of a specific time and place. In the context of poverty, traditional norms strongly compete with the changing world for dominance, and the outcome is transitions that are neither linear nor predictable (for example, at the age of 16, some are married, others begin paid work, while most still attend school).

In Ethiopia (unlike in developed countries, where children's transitions are more or less predictable, with – for example – schooling, work and marriage serving as central pathways), children's life transitions are more likely to be tangled. In such contexts, the life-course perspective needs to adapt to the changing features of intergenerational relationships. A cohort study, like the Young Lives study, on which this paper is based, could contribute to it.

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Intergenerational Relationships and the Life Course: Changing Relations between Children and Caregivers in Ethiopia

Drawing on three rounds of survey and qualitative data collected by the Young Lives study in Ethiopia among children born in 1994–95 and their caregivers, this paper investigates intergenerational relationships by means of the life-course perspective. The life-course perspective establishes the importance of understanding intergenerational relationships within changing contexts of time and place.

The study shows that parent–child relations are taken for granted when children are young; but as they grow older, parental expectations and filial obligations become explicit. In the context of rapid social change, which sometimes carries risks for children, parents assume that they have an obligation to guide their children.

With the expansion of modern education and children's exposure to different experiences outside the family, many of them contest parental values, norms and expectations. Schooling and other competing agents of 'socialisation' have contributed to increased intergenerational conflicts and negotiations. One important outcome of such changes is the transformation of relationships based on traditional processes of socialisation where norms and practices have been simply transmitted across generations, into 'negotiated' relationships where children's agency become increasingly visible.

On the other hand, in the context of poverty and social change, children's key transitions have become more unpredictable. For example, at one and the same age, children could be in school, or in paid work, or married, or having their own child. Such multiple pathways make it difficult for parents to transfer traditional age-based societal norms. The unpredictability and multiplicity of transitions are also major challenges for the life-course perspective as applied to intergenerational relationships. A life-course perspective needs to adapt to such changing circumstances, using the type of longitudinal evidence on which this paper is based.

Young Lives
An International Study of Childhood Poverty

About Young Lives

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty, involving 12,000 children in 4 countries over 15 years. It is led by a team in the Department of International Development at the University of Oxford in association with research and policy partners in the 4 study countries: Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam.

Through researching different aspects of children's lives, we seek to improve policies and programmes for children.

Young Lives Partners

Young Lives is coordinated by a small team based at the University of Oxford, led by Professor Jo Boyden.

- *Ethiopian Development Research Institute, Ethiopia*
- *Centre for Economic and Social Sciences, Andhra Pradesh, India*
- *Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visvavidyalayam (Women's University), Andhra Pradesh, India*
- *Grupo de Análisis para el Desarollo (Group for the Analysis of Development), Peru*
- *Instituto de Investigación Nutricional (Institute for Nutrition Research), Peru*
- *Center for Analysis and Forecasting, Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam*
- *General Statistics Office, Vietnam*
- *Child and Youth Studies Group (CREET), The Open University, UK*
- *Oxford Department of International Development (ODID), University of Oxford, UK*
- *Save the Children*

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