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The Nexus between Gendered Power Relations and Socioeconomic Livelihoods of Female-Headed Households: Evidence from Uganda

Charles Godfrey Mukundane[1], Medard Twinamatsiko[1], Neema Mureembe[1]

[1]*(Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Uganda)*
[2]*(Faculty of Business Economics and Governance, Bishop Stuart University Mbarara, Uganda)*
Corresponding author: Charles Godfrey Mukundane

ABSTRACT : Managing a home is traditionally appreciated as the role-sharing phenomenon between a man and woman with their children at some point. Over time, there has been an evolution of family structure not only here in Uganda but the rest of the world. We have seen a growing number of number of female-headed households, which was not the case in the past. In such scenarios, research findings have emerged pointing out the underlying issues surrounding gendered power relations and socioeconomic livelihoods among female-headed households. Whereas most studies have been conducted in most parts of the world, there has been a knowledge gap in the context of Uganda. The present study examined the nexus between gendered power relations and socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households with a special focus on the Mbarara district of Southwestern Uganda. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design with a quantitative approach to data collection and analysis. The study surveyed 360 households from six sub-counties and identified 186 respondents who participated in this study, using simple random sampling techniques. Data collection was done using structured questionnaires. Data gathered through these questionnaires was thoroughly checked for completeness, entered into Excel sheets and exported to SPSS version 26 for final analysis. The analysis utilized both descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequencies, per cent, mean, standard deviation, Pearson Correlation and hierarchical regression. The study was cleared by the Uganda National for Science and Technology (UNCST) with registration number SS2293ES. Results from the study show that there is a positive insignificant relationship between gender relations and socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households in Mbarara District (r=.126, p<.01). The control variables of Age and level of education were found to contribute a statistically significant explanatory power of 3.4% in explaining socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households. The variables entered in the regression model explain an overall 28.4% (AdjR^2 = .284) of the variance in socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households, implying that the remaining 71.6% is explained by factors not considered in this study. The study concluded that gendered power relations do not predict the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households. The study recommends that there is a need to advocate for improved women's health which predicts their longevity and educational attained, which is found to hold a bearing on the socioeconomic well-being of female-headed households. Future studies need to focus on the influence of socio-demographics on the livelihoods of female-headed households.

Keywords - Gender, Power Relations, Socioeconomic, Livelihoods, Demographic Characteristics

I. INTRODUCTION

The patriarchal nature of many societies has kept power relations in the home vested and viewed in the masculine perspective (Bonvillain, 2020). In many societies, men are taken and viewed as the heads of families despite the changes that have happened in the contemporary (Reeves, 2022). Whereas this is the way it is, we have witnessed some paradigm shifts where females have headed families successfully and or circumstantially. This set-up is increasingly gaining prominence on the global stage (Folbre, 2019). Notwithstanding the sentiments, perceptions, attitudes and practices embedded in most societies, the prevalence of female-headed families is at record increasing across societies (Folbre, 2019; Mencher, 2019). Many factors have been studied to be behind this cause including but not limited to the changes in family patterns, diseases such as HIV/AIDS,

economic disparities, cultural shifts, economic migrations and enlightenment (Asiedu, Karimu, & Iddrisu, 2024; Reeves, 2022). What is clear now is that this phenomenon exists with its underlying challenges among which is socioeconomic livelihoods. Studies have been conducted to ascertain the existing challenges related to the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households, however, the results obtained are inconclusive.

In Uganda, women are discriminated against and placed in a position that almost everyone perceives as less likely to head the family (Doss, et al., 2012). Despite these views and perceptions, the trend of female-headed households in Uganda is an upward trend (Nalule, 2015). Women in Uganda seem to have low bargaining power in productive roles, which are domesticated and unpaid such as looking after the household, cooking and child-rearing (Skoglund & Samarikoff, 2019). As a result, they have suffered socioeconomic inequalities related to limited rights on land utilization, decision-making on health utilization, education and overall independent decision-making (Mpuuga, Bulime, & Ogwang, 2021). This burden affects them heavily to the point where they find themselves at the help of families in the event of the death of a man, separation and divorce (Nalule, 2015). Society finds it difficult to accept them as fit for taking care of full responsibility for managing their own family. This is made complex by the nature of families which are extended in nature bringing an overlapping confusion from the rest of the big family network (Nalule, 2015).

Strengthening the position of females in food production is a key catalyst for their sustainable and healthy socio-economic livelihoods (McKenna, 2014). The Government of Uganda with its development partners put in place initiatives to empower women in socioeconomic spheres such as the Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP) and Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) at the grassroots (McKenna, 2014). These initiatives coupled with the girl-child education movement registered a mark though major gaps are still existing particularly for the case of female-headed households. However, the situation is not as desired, a study by Skoglund and Samarikoff (2019) revealed that women lack access to resources and knowledge of their rights to resources such further found that land that could enhance their socioeconomic growth and development. Though women provide up to 80% of the labour required in agriculture for household food production, they face difficulties when it comes to ownership of productive resources such as finance, land, credit and productivity-enhancing inputs and services as compared to men (Mpuuga et al., 2021).

The situation is worse in female-headed households, whose attachment to extended families has drawn them into conflicts regarding the utilization of resources. The family system which is embedded in an extended family setup has in most cases rendered the would-be female heads, to remain without a say on resources they are theirs (Rwangire & Muriisa, 2021). Incidentally, there happens to be poor utilization of productive resources, particularly land and the most outstanding outcome in rural communities is always food insecurity. Available evidence reflects the dominance of males in access to, control over, and ownership of production resources in Uganda.

Studies by Busingye, Kazooba, and Tumuhimbise (2018), Rwangire and Muriisa (2021) and Nyakato, Rwabukwali and Kools, 2020) on women's socioeconomic livelihoods, found that women are socioeconomically disadvantaged in terms land rights, access to finance and decision making at the family level. Eventually, this affects socioeconomic livelihoods within their households and general lifestyle. Though these studies were able to point out issues underneath the gendered power relations, the issue of female-headed households about food production and socioeconomic livelihoods did not stand out, this leaves a knowledge gap that requires further investigation. It is from this background that this study is based on examining the relationship between gendered power relations and socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households in Mbarara District.

Objective

To examine the relationship between gendered power relations and socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households in Mbarara District.

II.   METHODOLOGY

The study utilised a cross-sectional research design with a quantitative approach premised on household surveys in Mbarara District. The study was conducted in 360 households selected randomly from the eight sub-counties of Rubaya, Rwanyamahembe, Bubaare, Rubindi, Bukiiro, Rubindi, Kashare, and Kagongi. Using a simple random sampling technique, a sample size of 186 respondents was arrived at using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination model. With the help of structured questionnaires and assisted by two research assistants, the researcher was able to collect data from these respondents. After data collection was done, questionnaires were thoroughly checked for completeness and data entry commenced. Data analysis involved entry into Excel sheets for coding and cleaning. After this process, it was entered into SPSS version 26 for analysis. Statistical analysis involved the use of frequencies, per cent, mean, standard deviations, Pearson Correlation and Hierarchical Regression. The study was cleared by the Uganda National for Science and Technology (UNCST) with registration number SS2293ES.

III.   RESULTS

Demographic characteristics of respondents

In this study, we considered sex, age, education, marital status, number of people in the household as well as land ownership as the main demographic characteristics.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Per cent
Sex		
Male	79	42.5
Female	107	57.5
Age		
18-30	20	10.8
31-40	48	25.8
41-50	64	34.4
51+	54	29
Education		
Primary	142	76.3
High school	35	18.8
Tertiary	6	3.2
University graduate	3	1.6
Marital status		
Separated	85	45.7
Widowed	64	34.4
Married	37	19.9
Religion		
Anglican	82	44.1
Catholic	87	46.8
Pentecostal	17	9.1
Land Ownership		
Yes	167	89.8
No	19	10.2

Results from Table 4.1 indicate that the majority of the respondents 57.5% were female. Most of the respondents 34.4 were aged between 41-50. This implies that the majority of the respondents were mature and therefore had mature and experienced insights about gender relations, food production and socioeconomic livelihoods among female-headed households. A significant number of the participants 76.3% had a primary level of education. The prevalence of primary-level education among respondents highlights significant challenges in employment, agricultural productivity, access to resources, and overall household well-being. On the side of marital status, the majority of the respondents 45.7% had separated from their spouses. The prevalence of separation from marriage among respondents highlights complex dynamics related to economic independence, gender relations, and household resilience within female-headed households. The highest number of participants 46.8% were Catholics. This implies that the majority of the people here have deep-rooted religious beliefs, norms and values. And, 89.8% of the respondents owned land. This implies that the majority of the respondents had access to land which is the major factor of production.

Descriptive statistics for the Global Variables

The descending order of mean was used to rank the variables in descending order. The scores for each variable were obtained by computing all the items measuring that variable into a single variable under the cash reconciliation, cash control, expense forecasting and financial performance. Mean was also used to analyze the findings, where a mean of 3.00 implies an average score, a mean above 3.00 implies that the variable scored above average while a mean below 3 means implies that the variable scored below average. In addition, the standard deviation was also used where by a standard deviation close to one implied that the score was above the score and a standard deviation close to zero implied that the score was below the average.

Table 2: Showing the Descriptive Statistics for the Global Variables

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender relations	186	1.00	5.00	3.037	0.514
Socioeconomic livelihoods	186	1.00	5.00	3.724	0.716
Valid N (listwise)	186				

From the Global variables, a mean feedback of 3.037 was obtained from the gender relations variable indicating that participants agreed with of the responses on this scale. Finally, a mean feedback of 3.724 was obtained from the variable of socioeconomic livelihood, also portraying an agreement with most of the statements on the checklist.

Pearson Correlation

Pearson's Correlation analysis was conducted to measure the strength of linear associations between the study variables and is denoted by r. The Pearson correlation coefficient, *r*, can take a range of values from +1 to -1. A value of 0 indicates that there is no association between the two variables. A value greater than 0 indicates a positive association; that is, as the value of one variable increases, so does the value of the other variable. A value less than 0 indicates a negative association; that is, as the value of one variable increases, the value of the other variable decreases. The study variables were measured on a continuous scale, and thus Pearson correlation was found to be the most appropriate to test the relationships between the variables. Results on this are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: The Correlation results

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Access to resources (1)	1								
Access to finance and other resources (2)	.161	1							
Decision-making on resource utilization (3)	.148	.451**	1						
Gender relations (4)	.740**	.687**	.668**	1					
Managerial knowledge (5)	.023	.108	.163	.122	1				
Managerial abilities (6)	.016	.127	.126	.111	.712**	1			
Managerial skills (7)	-.076	.226*	.168	.112	.474**	.554**	1		
Socioeconomic Livelihoods (9)	-.045	.151	.234*	**.126**	.366**	.295**	.550**	.491**	1
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).									
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).									

Results show that the relationship between gender relations and socioeconomic livelihoods is insignificant. This implies that gender relations have no significant impact on the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed families.

Table 4: Hierarchical Regression Results

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
Variable	B	SE	B	B	SE	B	B	SE	β
Constant	3.291	.210		2.895	.512		.987	.587	
Age	.172	.117	.166	.153	.120	.147	.169	.104	.163
Level of education	-.050	.064	.088	-.050	.064	-.088	-.073	.056	-.128
Gender relations				.100	.118	.098	.028	.104	.028
R		0.184			0.207			0.533	
R²		0.034			0.043			0.304	
Adj R²		0.008			0.005			**0.284**	
R²-Change		**0.034**			**0.009**			**0.241**	
F-Change		1.33			0.721			24.949	
Sig. F-Change		0.271			0.398			.000	
***. Correlation is significant at the .000 level (2-tailed).									
B. Unstandardized coefficient									

β. Standardized coefficient					
Dependent Variable: Socioeconomic livelihoods					

Results of Model 1 in Table 4 indicate that the control variables (Age of the respondents and level of education) contribute a statistically significant explanatory power of 3.4% in explaining the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households.

Model 2 shows that the addition of gender relations to the equation accounts for an extra 0.9% of the variance explained by the model ($R^2\Delta=.009$; $f\Delta= 0.721$; $p<.05$). The findings further confirm a positive but insignificant relationship between gender relations and socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households ($\beta= .098$; $p<05$). The variables entered in the regression model explain an overall 28.4% ($AdjR^2 = .284$) of the variance in socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households, implying that the remaining 71.6% is explained by factors not considered in this study.

IV.   DISCUSSION

It was established that there is a positive but insignificant relationship between gender relations and the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households in the Mbarara district. On the other hand, the study found that there is a positive significant relationship between gender relations and the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households in the Mbarara district. Among the dimensions of gender relations, only decision-making on resource utilization has a positive significant relationship with the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households and all the components of socioeconomic livelihoods have a positive significant relationship with gender relations.

The findings from this study contradict findings from the study by Nyathi (2018) on socioeconomic challenges facing female-headed households in rural districts of Zimbabwe, which expressed that female-headed households are faced with a double burden in accessing basic livelihoods due to unfavourable power dynamics. This is attributed to patriarchal thinking embedded in community perceptions and attitudes towards the role of women in the home. These findings were in agreement with another study done in Ganha by Ngulube (2018) who revealed that women were facing deeply rooted male-dominated power owing to cultural and religious practices in many rural communities of Ghana. As a result, female-headed households were facing challenges to break this cycle and stay afloat in terms of socioeconomic livelihoods. Drawing evidence from these studies, it appears that the current findings from the present study portray a unique aspect that requires deeper analysis. However, from the findings, we found out that decision-making at the household level of female-headed, would most times be influenced by men either the older son in the home or other men from the extended family. This calls for further interrogation looking at other methodological aspects such as qualitative study conducted on this same population.

From the sociodemographic perspective, the Age of the household head was positive and statistically significant, meaning that young household heads had less diversified livelihoods than older households. These results were inconsistent with most of the available literature that suggests that younger household heads have more diversified livelihoods than older household heads (Bryceson, 2000; Adi, 2007; Berhanu et al., 2007; Zerai and Gebreezghiabher, 2011). However, these results were consistent with findings by Khatun and Roy (2012), who found that age was positively related to the number of livelihood diversification strategies adopted by households in West Bengal. Karugia et al., (2006) also found a positive relationship between age and off-farm earnings in western Kenya, meaning older household heads had more diversified livelihoods than their younger counterparts. They attributed this to the fact that elderly household heads may have had more resource endowment saved over time compared to younger counterparts, which would enable them to engage in high-return livelihood strategies, e.g., businesses or even possess productive assets that the young did not have. Khatun and Roy (2012) also indicate that experience increases with age; hence, experienced farmers have more prospects of getting jobs off-farm. This would enable them to participate in more livelihood strategies compared to younger household heads. Nonetheless, as the household head advanced in age the number of livelihood strategies adopted reduced which is evidenced by the negative and statistically significant age-squared variable. This could be attributed to the fact that as one advances in age, they become less productive.

V.   CONCLUSION

The study established that there is a positive but insignificant relationship between gender power relations and the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households. These findings imply that whereas gender power relations are seen as a powerful dimension in the family setting in Uganda, they do not necessarily influence the socioeconomic livelihoods of these families. What was found to be significant were the age and education levels of respondents in this study. We established that being mature and educated predicted improved socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households.

Recommendations

Since we found out that demographic characteristics such as age and gender had a bearing on the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households, we recommend advocacy for and investment in girl child education. According to research, this guarantees economic independence and life expectancy.

We also recommend that a full study be done on testing the viability of socio-demographics in influencing the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed families. An inquiry can be made into other factors influencing the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households.

This study was entirely quantitative, and this posed a methodological limitation, leaving a gap to be filled by deploying the qualitative aspect. This would help to explore the natural aspects that can never be measured using statistical methods.

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Corresponding author: Charles Godfrey Mukundane, Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Mbarara Uganda