

The Effect of Gendered Power Relations on Socioeconomic Livelihoods of Female-Headed-Households in Mbarara District, Southwestern Uganda

Charles Godfrey Mukundane^{1,3*}, Medard Twinamatsiko²,
Clementia Neema Murembe¹, Sedrack Atuhaire²

¹Department of Human Development and Relational Sciences, Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies,
Mbarara University of Science and Technology

²Department of Environment and Livelihood Support Systems, Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies,
Mbarara University of Science and Technology

³Faculty of Business, Economics and Governance, Bishop Stuart University

*Corresponding Author: Charles Godfrey Mukundane¹

ABSTRACT:- This study examined the effect of gendered power relations on the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households in Mbarara District, Southwestern Uganda. The study undertook a cross-sectional survey design with a quantitative approach to data collection and analysis. A sample size of 186 respondents was selected randomly from the targeted households in Mbarara District. Data from the questionnaires was coded, entered into SPSS, and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results established a significant positive correlation between gendered power relations and socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households ($r = 0.647^{**}$, $p < 0.001$). The study concludes that any positive change towards gendered power relations leads to a positive change towards socioeconomic livelihoods among female-headed households. The study recommends the empowerment of female heads to bridge gaps brought about by patriarchal practices that have compromised gendered power relations among these homes.

Keywords:- Gender, Power Relations, Female-headed, Households, Socioeconomic, Livelihoods

I. INTRODUCTION

In most parts of the global south, particularly, Sub Saharan Africa, gendered power relations have a significant influence on access to resources, decision-making, control of resources and overall running of family affairs among female-headed households (Annan et al., 2021; Bieteru, 2019; Flatø et al., 2017). These power dynamics are shaped by cultural, social, and economic factors that determine the distribution of labour, income, and control over assets (Bieteru, 2019; Shibata et al., 2020). In Uganda, female-headed households are a growing demographic trend due to factors such as divorce, widowhood, single motherhood, and labour migration, and they often experience unique challenges in navigating these power structures, which directly affect their socioeconomic livelihoods (Boonabana, 2015; Nalule, 2015; Ndagire, 2021). Women in these households frequently face restricted access to critical economic resources such as land, credit, and employment opportunities (Busingye et al., 2018; Ndagire, 2021). Traditional norms that favour male dominance in resource ownership and decision-making exacerbate these challenges, limiting women's capacity to improve their household incomes and overall well-being (Nakazawa, 2017; Rwangire & Kabeba Muriisa, 2021). Studies have established that female-headed households are often burdened with the dual responsibility of care work and income generation, which limits their ability to engage in productive economic activities (FRANK, 2022; Ndagire, 2021; Wanjala, 2021).

These power imbalances result in reduced bargaining power for female heads of households in markets and community spaces, where men often have more influence over economic transactions and access to social capital (Adem et al., 2022; Mpuuga et al., 2021, 2023; Rwangire & Kabeba Muriisa, 2021). Additionally, structural barriers, such as gender-based discrimination in access to financial services and agricultural inputs, compound the difficulties faced by these households (Boonabana, 2015; Busingye et al., 2018). In an agricultural

district like Mbarara, where land is the primary productive asset, female-headed households struggle to secure land ownership and tenure rights, which further undermines their ability to participate fully in income-generating activities (Mbabazia et al., 2018). The socioeconomic impact of these inequalities is reflected in higher poverty levels, food insecurity, and limited access to education and healthcare services within female-headed households compared to male-headed counterparts (Boonabana, 2015; Nalule, 2015). Despite government efforts to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment, such as through the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP) and other gender-responsive policies, disparities in power dynamics within households persist, hindering progress toward improving the livelihoods of female-headed households (Acosta, 2020; Acosta et al., 2019; Acosta et al., 2021).

Understanding the effect of gendered power relations on the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households is critical for designing targeted interventions that address the specific needs of these women and promote equitable access to resources (Mbakaya, 2022). This study explored how gendered power relations influence economic outcomes for female-headed households in Mbarara District, focusing on key factors such as land ownership, labour division, decision-making autonomy, and access to credit. The findings will provide insights into policy and programmatic interventions aimed at improving the economic well-being and resilience of female-headed households in Mbarara District and similar contexts across Uganda.

II. OBJECTIVE

To how gendered power relations influence economic outcomes for female-headed households in Mbarara District.

III. JUSTIFICATION

The livelihoods of female-headed households in Uganda are often constrained by gendered power relations, which limit their access to essential resources such as land, finance, and economic opportunities. In Mbarara District, Southwestern Uganda, these households are particularly vulnerable due to the intersection of traditional norms that favour male dominance in decision-making and structural barriers that restrict women's participation in productive activities. Despite national efforts to promote gender equality through policies such as the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP), the economic outcomes of female-headed households remain suboptimal. Understanding the influence of power imbalances on economic livelihoods is essential for identifying specific challenges and opportunities for empowering these households. This study will provide empirical evidence on how gendered power dynamics shape the socioeconomic conditions of female-headed households, informing policymakers and development practitioners on strategies to enhance the economic resilience of these households. Addressing this gap is crucial for achieving inclusive development, reducing poverty, and ensuring gender-responsive policies that align with Uganda's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-section research design utilizing a quantitative approach. A sample size of 186 respondents was randomly selected from eight sub-counties of the Mbarara District in rural southwestern Uganda. These were subjected to a questionnaire survey method of data collection through interviews. Before field data collection, quality control of questionnaires was ensured through validity and reliability. By reliability, the tool was undertaken through pre-testing in the field and Cronbach Alpha was calculated. Validity was ensured through expert rating to ensure internal consistency. Data collected through these questionnaires was thoroughly checked for completeness, coded and entered into SPSS version 21 for analysis. Data analysis utilized descriptive such as frequencies, percent, mean and standard deviations and inferential statistics particularly Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The study was approved by Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Research Ethics Committee (MUST-2022-703) and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (SS2293ES). In the field, authorization was obtained from the Mbarara District Chief Administrative Officer and each participant gave informed consent following an oral interaction with the research team. In this aspect, respondents were assured of confidentiality, their rights of participation as well as privacy.

V. RESULTS

How gendered power relations have affected the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households

In order to understand how gendered power relations have affected the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households, participants were asked to state how gendered power relations have affected the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households. The elicited results in this section are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: How gendered power relations have affected the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households

Responses	Response Rate					Mean	Std.
	SD	D	NS	A	SA		
Respecting gender roles at the household level has increased household income	0 (0.0%)	64 (34.4%)	10 (5.4%)	112 (60.2)	0 (0.0%)	3.56	.847
Limited access to land has affected my household income	28 (15.1%)	18 (9.7%)	0 (0.0%)	73 (39.2%)	67 (36%)	3.72	.829
Having control over resources has increased food security in my household.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	74 (39.8%)	112 (60.2%)	4.69	.931
Planning together as a household has increased our family's social wellbeing	0 (0.0%)	9 (4.8%)	0 (0.0%)	117 (95.2%)	0 (0.0%)	4.32	.903
Working together as a family has increased the health status of our household	19 (10.2%)	94 (50.5%)	0 (0.0%)	73 (39.2%)	0 (0.0%)	2.11	.056
Participating in financing decisions has increased our household income	29 (15.6%)	46 (24.7%)	0 (0.0%)	73 (39.2%)	38 (20.4%)	3.68	.603
Joint decision-making has helped us to increase the sustainable use of resources	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	29 (15.6%)	56 (30.1%)	101 (54.3%)	3.99	.843
The involvement of both males and females in the decision of food production has promoted household food security	0 (0.0%)	8 (4.3%)	10 (5.4%)	128 (68.8)	40 (21.5%)	4.88	.971

From Table 1, respondents were asked to respond to the statement that respecting gender roles at the household level, has increased household income has increased and the majority agreed 60.2% agreed with this statement whereas the least 5.4% were not sure about it. This is an indication that respecting gender roles at the household level has increased household income.

Another statement was that Limited access to land has affected my household income, and most of the respondents 39.2% agreed with this statement whereas the least 9.7% disagreed with it. This implies that there is a relationship between access to land and household income among families in the Mbarara district.

Regarding control over resources, a statement was put to respondents that; having control over resources has increased food security in my household, and most of them 60.2% strongly agreed with this statement whereas the least 39.8% agreed with it. This implies that the more control over resources the family members have, the higher the chances for them to have improved access to socioeconomic livelihoods such as food, education and healthcare.

It was also found out that most of the respondents 50.5% disagreed with the statement put to them that participating in financing decisions has increased our household income, whereas the least 10.2% strongly disagreed with this viewpoint. This implies that most families do not engage all family members in financial decision-making.

Another statement was that joint decision-making has helped us to increase the sustainable use of resources, and this was agreed upon by most of the respondents 39.2% whereas the least 20.4% strongly agreed with it. This shows that when families do joint decision-making, sustainable resource utilization is attained.

Finally, we established from the statement that the involvement of both males and females in the decision of food production has improved socioeconomic livelihoods at the family level, that involvement of both genders in the decision is important for promoting household improved socioeconomic livelihoods and this was strongly agreed by 68.8% whereas the least 4.3% were not sure. This shows that when there is cooperation of the family in food production, there is a high likelihood of increased food security at the household level.

The relationship between gendered power relations and socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households

To ascertain how gendered power relations influence the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households, the Pearson Product moment correlation matrix was run to determine the relationship between these variables. Results on this are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The relationship between gendered power relations and socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households

		Gendered relations	powerSocioeconomic livelihoods
Gendered power relations	Pearson relationship	1	.647**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	Number	186	186
Socioeconomic livelihoods	Pearson relationship	.647**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	Number	186	186

** . Significant Correlation at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results from Table 2 show that a substantial positive association exists amidst gendered power relations and socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households ($r = 0.647^{**}$, $p < 0.001$). This observation displays a signal that gendered power relations positively influence the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households. Additionally, this analysis postulates that if gendered power relations are properly handled, with other factors held constant, there are higher chances that socioeconomic livelihoods among female-headed households will be enhanced. A signal that any component of positive change in gendered power relations stimulates a positive modification in socioeconomic livelihoods among female-headed households up to 64.7%.

VI. DISCUSSION

We established from this study that there is a strong positive relationship between gendered power relations and the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households in the Mbarara district. Dimensions of socioeconomic livelihoods such as respect to gender roles, joint decision-making, planning together and having control over resources were found to positively influence the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households. This implies that where gender roles are respected but semi-permeable boundaries control resource utilization, improved socioeconomic livelihoods are assured among female-headed households. These findings are in agreement with prior findings by Nyathi (2018) in a study on the socioeconomic challenges affecting female-headed households in rural districts of Zimbabwe which found that gendered power relations were significantly correlated with socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households. These findings further concur with Kabeer (2021) who expressed that gender relations at the household level among female-headed households have a strong bearing on their socioeconomic well-being.

In the context of gendered power relations, The Power Relations Theory emphasizes how the distribution of power between genders affects social and economic interactions, particularly within households and communities (Yimam, 2014). As has been found out in this study and emphasized by previous studies, power dynamics in society are not evenly distributed and are affected by factors such as gender, age, race, education levels and socioeconomic status among others (Shibata et al., 2020; Thobejane & Nyathi, 2018; Wondimu et al., 2022). Understanding the positive relationship between gendered power relations and socioeconomic livelihoods is crucial for policymakers and development practitioners. It underscores the importance of promoting gender equality and empowering women as a strategy for improving the livelihoods of female-headed households and achieving broader development goals.

Findings further revealed that the involvement of both males and females in the decision of food production has improved socioeconomic livelihoods at the family level and that the involvement of both genders in the decision is important for promoting household-improved socio-economic livelihoods. These findings show that when there is consensus on resource utilization at the household level, it predicts improved socioeconomic livelihoods among female-headed households and the reverse is true. These findings concur with Ndagire (2021), which established that the involvement of both genders in farming improves the socioeconomic livelihoods of the family. Similar views were shared by Mbakaya (2022) in her study on exploring the potential of the household approach in enhancing women's participation in farm decision-making processes in Mzimba North, Malawi, which expressed that inclusion, equity, sharing, transparency and accountability participatory

values incorporated in the Household Approach, addressed most factors limiting women participation in farm decision-making process thereby enhancing their participation in most farm decision-making processes. These findings together with the current findings show that collaboration in decision and planning in agriculture production among females and males among female-headed households improves food production.

VII. CONCLUSION

The study established a significant positive correlation between gendered power relations and the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households in the Mbarara district. This implies that any positive change towards gendered power relations improves the socioeconomic livelihoods of female-headed households in the Mbarara district. The variables of gendered power relations such as planning together, joint decision making and respect for gender roles were below the average. All these affected gendered power relations in the home placing males above men, even when the families are seemingly female-headed at face value.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need to advocate for women's empowerment to improve their status in decision-making at the family level. For the last three decades, the Government of Uganda and its partners in development have invested a lot in gender mainstreaming but the gaps are still existing as have been revealed by the current study. This calls for new approaches to tackle this challenge that has persisted for so long.

There is a need to enhance the agency of women to participate in asset ownership and household economic decision-making, expand female literacy and education, and diversify income sources to include off-farm wage employment in Mbarara District.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge the support rendered by the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mbarara University of Science and Technology during this study project. We are indebted to the support by Faculty of Business, Economics and Governance, Bishop Stuart University for the support extended to the Corresponding Author. Finally, appreciation goes to the entire research team for executing their roles diligently from proposal development up to the final stage of this project.

Declaration

The authors declare neither conflict of interest nor competing interests at all.

Author's Contribution

CGM conceived the study concept and developed the proposal. CGM, MT, and NM participated in tool development and validation. CGM and SA collected, and analysed data. CGM, MT, and NM developed the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript for publication.

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***Corresponding Author: Charles Godfrey Mukundane¹**

¹*Department of Human Development and Relational Sciences, Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mbarara University of Science and Technology*