

Investigating trends and patterns in household marital power structure between couples across 4 generations (1980-2018): A study of marriage and gender power relations

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Abstract

This study examined changes in marital power settings between couples over a space of 40 years. The central question is whether the traditional gender inequality gap is closing and women are experiencing increasing levels of power, signaling shifts in marital power from the traditional male-dominated household power pattern to more egalitarian power structure in new and emerging families. To answer this question, we compared power structure in traditional marriages contracted across four decades: 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. Power was defined and measured as "who decides what, when and how" in key household decision-making domains. Relative power was also measured with respect to income gap, age difference, and educational difference among couples. Preliminary data involved the analysis of standardized national Demographic and Health surveys across 7 sub-Saharan African countries, and involving a total of 181,631 ever-in-union women. Our findings reveal that though men still dominate marital relationships in key household decision making domains, the pattern is gradually changing in newer marriages. While women in older marriages are more likely to be autonomous in decision-making domains, women in newer marriages are more likely to engage in joint family decision-making with husbands. There is evidence that seems to suggest gradual changes in household decision-making and power-sharing configurations across the years.

INTRODUCTION

Numerous gender equality and women empowerment programs and policy interventions have been designed and implemented in the last decade of the 20th century (1990s) till date, with an overarching goal of promoting gender equality and eradicate all forms of discrimination against women (African Union Commission et al., 2013). In sub-Saharan Africa, remarkable progress have been reported in various targets of the defunct United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) from 2000-2015, and the subsequent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from 2015-2030. However, what is not clear is whether the progresses achieved in ideational transformation towards egalitarian gender views (Pierotti, 2013) or in female labour force participation can be shown in the patterns of gender power configurations between couples in key household decision-making participation, relative age at marriage (comparing post 2010 marriages with older ones) and relative income, among others. Put differently, do women entering “new marriages” have increasing levels of power relative to husbands compared to older ones? Put another way, do new marriages provide any or some evidences of gender power shifts or power balancing between new couples compared to older ones?

Gender power structure was measured in four key domains: (i) Spousal relative age, (ii) Spousal relative education, (iii) Spousal relative income, (iv) Household decision-making participation – who decides “what, when and how”?

Methods

Multiple-waves data from seven sub-Saharan African countries (3 waves from each) collected between 2000 and 2018 were employed and analyzed at univariate, bivariate and multivariate levels. Benin (2006, 2011, 2017-2018 BDHS), Ethiopia (2005, 2011, 2016 EDHS), Tanzania (2004-05, 2010, 2015-16 TDHS), Kenya (2003, 2008-09, 2014 KDHS), Malawi (2004, 2010, 2015-16 MDHS), Zimbabwe (2005-06, 2010-11, 2015 ZiDHS), and, Zambia (2001, 2007, 2013-14). Together, these involved a total of 181,631 women aged 15-49 in each study setting.

Result

Result of trends in spousal power relations are presented in charts and tables below. Figure 1 below shows a significant increase in women’s relative power in key household decision-making domains compared to husband. First, compared to wave 1, women’s participation in economic

decisions on large household purchases improved by 41% from 44.4% in waves 1 to 63% by the wave 3 (2014-2018). Similarly, African households experienced little to moderate increase in women's participation in decision on how to spend her own income, and decisions on family visits by 2.5% and 15%, respectively. However, as shown on Table 1, the result is non-linear and in each of the countries studied.

Figure 2 shows significantly large increase in women's income relative to husband. Compared to the first wave of data collection (, the percentage of women who earn "about the same income" as husband increased significantly by 782% from only 1.7% to 15%. Similarly, those who earn "more income than husband" increased by 783% from 1.2% to 10.6%. Results for each country is presented in Table 1 in the appendix.

Figure 3 however shows a little regress in women's relative educational attainment compared to husbands. The percentage of women who are as educated or more educated than husband dropped significantly in wave 3 (2014-2018 period) compared to the first decade of the new millennium. The reason for this may be higher increase male education and not necessarily a drop in female education. However, when trend in education is analyzed by marriage cohorts, comparing marriages contracted in 5-years intervals from 1979, a visible trend in improvement in relative education appears. Compared to marriages contracted in the 1970's and prior to 1989, marriages contracted in the post 1989 period show trends in closing the gender gap between couples. These results call for closer attention.

Conclusion

Unlike in previous decades, more women have become or are becoming increasing more likely to have same level of education, income as or more than their husband, and they are more likely to participate in key household decision-making domains. These improvements can be further developed to end or eradicate all forms of discrimination or violence perpetrated against women in both public and private lives. This is only a summary report. More findings and recommendations for policy implications will be discussed.

Figure 1 Trends (%) in women's participation in key household decision-making processes in seven sub-Saharan African countries

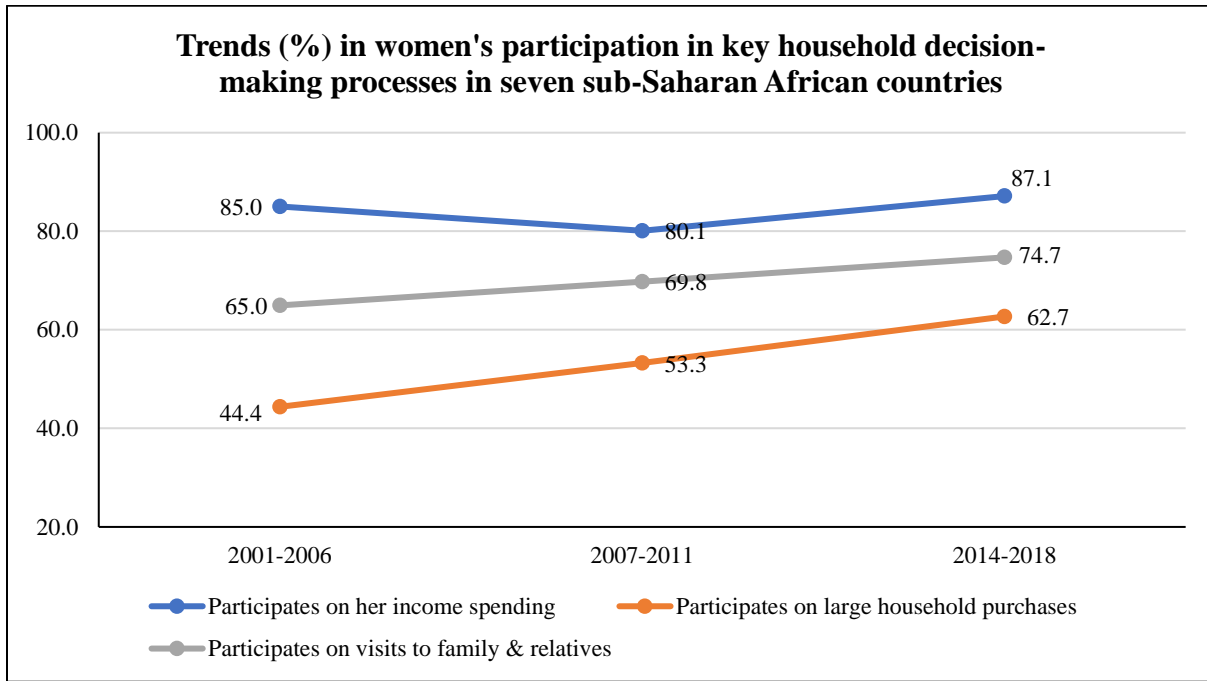


Figure 2 Trends (%) in women's income relative to husband (2001-2018)

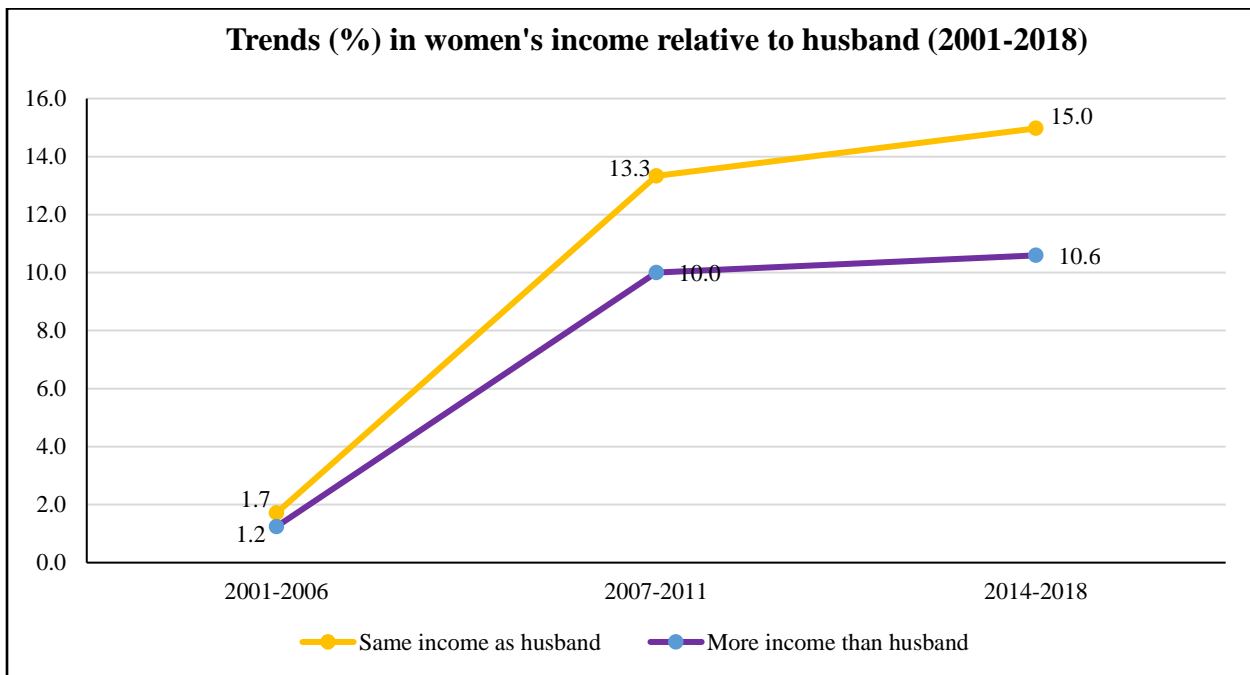


Figure 3 Trends (%) in women's relative education compared to husband in Seven Sub-Saharan African Countries (2001-2018)

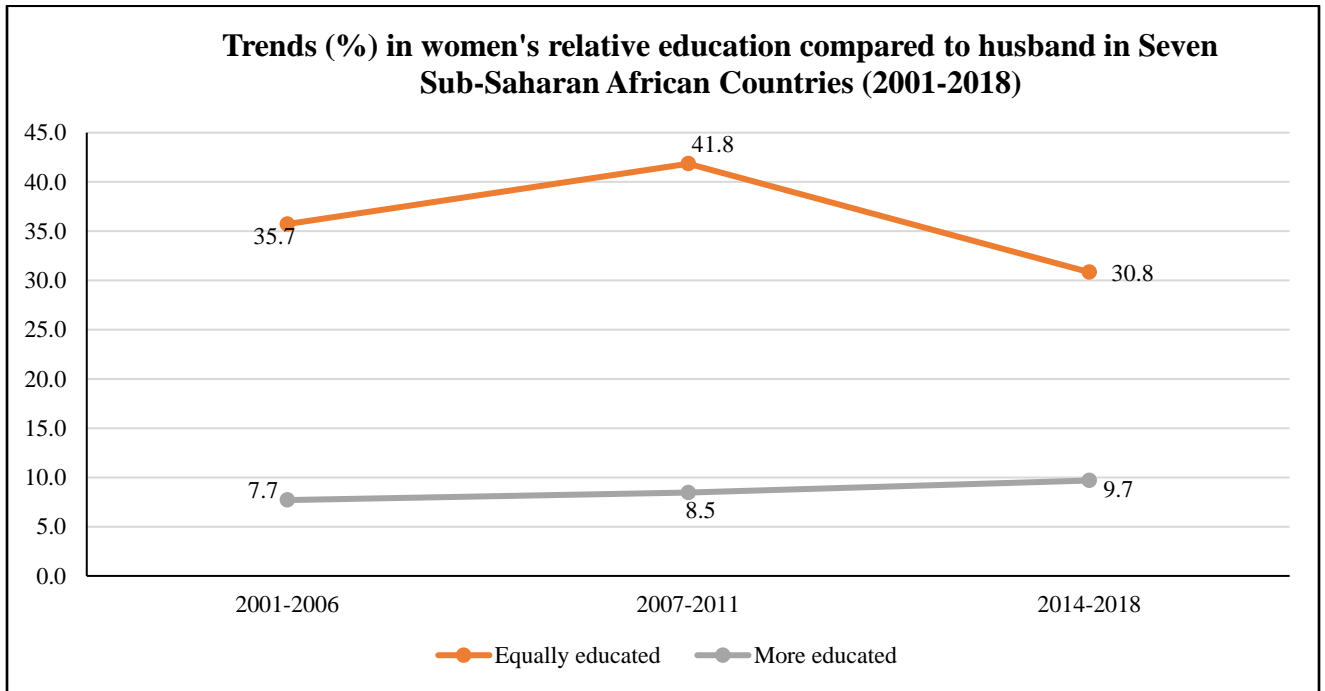


Figure 4 Marriage cohort analysis: Trends in closing education gender gap by marriage cohorts

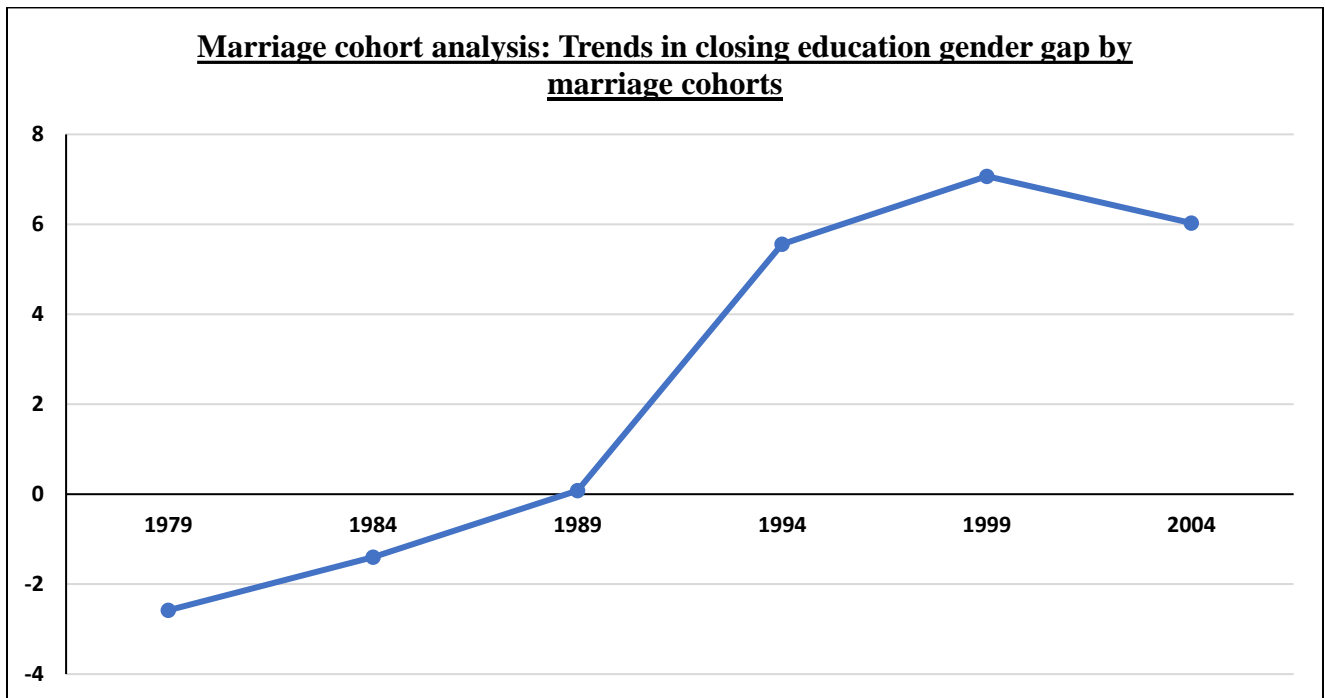


Table 1 All Trends in Women's Relative Socioeconomic status compared to husband in seven Sub-Saharan African countries

Variables	Benin			Ethiopia			Tanzania			Kenya		
	2006	2011	2017-2018	2005	2011	2016	2004-05	2010	2015-16	2003	2008-09	2014
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Justified IPV	52.0	19.8	34.6	85.4	74.4	66.9	62.1	56.9	61.3	72.8	55.3	44.5
Participates on her income spending	96.3	88.4	91.9	90.1	90.9	91.9	79.4	83.1	91.4	87.0	91.1	91.2
Participates on man's income spending	N/A	34.4	26.1	N/A	72.0	76.0	N/A	N/A	59.0	N/A	59.1	57.0
Participates on her health care decision	53.3	63.5	46.4	66.0	74.4	81.4	59.4	60.3	72.1	54.4	73.3	78.8
Participates on large household purchases	45.2	57.7	47.2	57.3	66.2	78.2	34.6	38.8	46.0	36.2	66.8	72.7
Participates on visits to family & relatives	67.4	68.9	66.5	78.6	77.8	83.8	49.8	49.5	58.4	58.4	73.1	73.5
Neither educated	45.7	47.6	44.5	54.8	42.3	38.4	11.6	8.9	6.0	8.0	6.0	2.4
Equally educated	10.4	11.3	13.2	11.3	20.3	20.9	55.9	59.4	57.5	53.4	58.0	26.7
More educated	6.0	6.3	9.8	5.8	8.4	10.0	9.0	9.5	12.2	9.0	9.0	5.6
Less educated	32.2	28.7	27.3	28.0	28.3	30.0	23.4	22.2	24.2	28.3	27.1	65.0
Same age	13.2	14.0	16.2	10.7	13.2	13.8	16.9	18.4	20.4	16.3	16.2	19.0
Older	1.7	3.0	2.6	1.2	1.5	1.4	2.0	1.9	2.2	1.2	1.1	1.5
Younger	85.2	83.0	81.2	88.1	85.3	84.8	81.1	79.7	77.5	82.6	82.7	79.6
Same income	N/A	4.6	7.5	N/A	19.9	21.0	N/A	13.3	20.1	N/A	16.7	12.7
More income	N/A	5.9	7.3	N/A	10.3	15.9	N/A	9.8	9.3	N/A	12.9	11.3
Less income	N/A	71.7	76.4	N/A	67.0	58.0	N/A	73.0	67.2	N/A	65.1	72.6
Man doesn't earn & DK	N/A	17.9	8.8	N/A	2.9	5.1	N/A	4.0	3.4	N/A	5.4	3.4
Total observation	13403	11680	11168	9066	10287	10223	6950	6412	8208	4919	4928	8665

Variables	Malawi			Zimbabwe			Zambia			All 7 countries (Weighted averages)		
	2004	2010	2015-16	2005-06	2010-11	2015	2001	2007	2013-14	2001-2006	2007-2011	2014-2018
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	All waves 1	All waves 2	All waves 3
Justified IPV	29.8	12.6	16.6	50.3	42.2	38.3	88.2	64.8	49.7	60.6	39.9	41.9
Participates on her income spending	65.7	57.8	75.6	94.1	92.7	94.5	73.2	78.6	83.9	85.0	80.1	87.1
Participates on man's income spending	N/A	31.6	54.9	N/A	82.8	81.4	N/A	56.3	66.8	0.0	44.9	58.1
Participates on her health care decision	27.8	55.4	67.6	82.0	84.2	84.8	41.5	64.8	74.1	54.1	65.8	70.5
Participates on large household purchases	18.0	30.0	55.4	90.7	87.5	86.8	36.5	55.6	66.4	44.4	53.3	62.7
Participates on visits to family & relatives	60.3	66.5	78.0	89.5	88.6	88.1	42.5	66.2	75.3	65.0	69.8	74.7
Neither educated	7.9	5.0	4.5	1.5	0.4	0.2	3.4	3.1	2.4	25.1	19.9	15.0
Equally educated	50.7	56.1	29.1	63.3	64.8	21.8	50.5	49.6	51.4	35.7	41.8	30.8
More educated	8.4	8.9	10.1	10.7	9.7	10.7	8.4	9.1	9.4	7.7	8.5	9.7
Less educated	32.5	29.7	55.2	23.5	23.4	65.7	37.1	36.6	34.5	29.6	28.1	42.7
Same age	20.5	22.0	24.0	18.0	21.8	21.4	15.0	18.0	18.7	15.3	17.7	19.3
Older	1.5	1.7	2.2	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.9	1.9
Younger	78.0	76.3	73.8	80.5	76.6	76.9	83.9	80.7	80.0	83.2	80.4	78.8
Same income	N/A	12.9	14.4	17.6	18.6	15.0	N/A	12.5	15.9	1.7	13.3	15.0
More income	N/A	9.7	7.8	12.8	14.0	12.8	N/A	13.3	12.5	1.2	10.0	10.6
Less income	N/A	73.2	70.1	65.6	60.3	68.0	N/A	69.0	68.0	6.4	69.5	68.8
Man doesn't earn & DK	N/A	4.2	7.7	4.1	7.1	4.2	N/A	5.2	3.6	0.4	7.1	5.6
Total observation	8305	15528	16130	5108	5702	6150	4694	4402	9702	52446	58939	70246

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