Reexamining the Relationship between Poverty and Sex of Household Heads: Evidence from Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)

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Introduction

Households headed by women and feminization of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa

Most of the research on female head of household is accomplished with the perspective of examining the situation of their family structure compared to poverty (Chant 2008). The idea that households run by women are the poorest of the poor is also repeated in a number of works in the context of sub-Saharan Africa (Bentley 2004; Dungumaro 2008), given the fact that the association between females household heads and the risk that a household is poor. Thus, in the literature review in the relationship between poverty and household heads in rural Africa, O'laughlin (1998) notes that from a diachronic point of view, it is not possible to conclude a systematic increase of female-headed households in the sub-region or that all the poor households were run by women. Examining the question from a transversal perspective also does not allow for a universal conclusion. For example, Dungumaro (2008) found that in south Africa, poor households are three times more likely to be headed by a female than a male, and that households headed by women are more commonly categorized as the most poor. The same conclusion was made in south Africa by Rogan (2013).

Methodology and Data:

The study is based on the analysis of individual characteristics of male and female households heads as well as characteristics of housing and possessions in the households. Data concerning 278,141 households and household heads in Ouagadougou was registered during the last population census in Burkina Faso in 2006. The individual variables included: sex of household head, age, occupation (whether or not the person engages in economic activities), marital status, level of education. The household characteristics were collected on one hand by type of households, occupation, nature of walls, means of using lights and kitchen, water collection source, garbage collection, and on the other hand, the number of televisions, phone lines, mobile telephones, refrigerators, bicycles, motorbikes and automobiles.

First, the profiles of the households were determined, taking into account the individual characteristics of the household heads as well as that of the household in order to identify the factors that determine the wealth of a household, based on whether they are male- or female-headed, based on a Principal Component Analysis (ACP). From a factorial plan defined by the first two components, we isolated the specific elements of each of the two categories of households based on sex.

The next step in our work consisted of evaluating the homogeneity (or heterogeneity) of each of the two categories of household heads defined by their gender. From the four most relevant individual variables about the household heads (age, education level, activity, marital

status) using the "TwoStep Cluster" method in order to distinguish the different sub-groups that seemed alike and common attributes shared by all household categories.

The third step of our work was the comparison between living conditions of household headed by male and those headed by women through a proxy indicator of the household living conditions using a *non utilitarist* approach.

Results

Table 1 : Number of female household heads by marital status and number of women for 100 household heads for the given marital status

Marital status	Female household heads	Number per cent household heads
Single	21.7	16
Married (monogamous)	26.0	6
Married (polygamous)	5.0	10
Consensual union	1.6	5
Divorced/separated	5.9	58
Widow	39.8	8
Total	*100.0*	*14*

Multivariate

<u>Heterogeneity in the Categories for Male and Female Households</u>

Based on age, schooling level, economic activity status and marital status of household heads, we obtain two homogenous groups of female household heads compared to three for male household heads. Overall, female household heads are less heterogeneous that the group of men (Table 2). The first sub-group of women (Gf1) is characterized by relatively high age (over 45 years); most of the women (83%) do not have any formal education; the majority do not participate in any economic activity (57%) (all retired people are considered); and the majority (72%) are widowed or divorced. The second sub-group (Gf2) has very different characteristics compared to those of the first group. The majority of the group is composed of young women, with 9 in 10 women being younger than 45. The women in the sub-group are for the most part educated (86%), and most often, have at least a secondary education (61%). The women mostly participated in economic activities (60%) and are usually single (45%) or in monogamous relationships.

For male household heads, it is more difficult (compared to female household heads) to isolate characteristics for each of the three groups. Nonetheless, the category can be divided into 3 sub-groups. The first sub-group (Gh1) is composed of 100% male household heads between 30 and 44 years old, that participate in economic activities and that are in monogamous relationships. The majority of the men in the sub-group are educated (61%) The second sub-group of male household heads (Gh2) is essentially composed of men over the age of 45 (9 in 10), and mostly monogamous (71%) However, it is important to note that this is

the only male sub-group that comprises polygamous men, widows and divorcés. The last sub-group of male household heads (Gh3) is structured around young men with 76% being younger than 30. It is made up of 77% active men and 62% single. Taking into account age, this subgroup has the lowest number of non-educated men (30%).

**Table 2 : Characteristics of subgroups of household heads**

		Female household heads		Male household heads		
		Gf1	Gf2	Gh1	Gh2	Gh3
Number of cases	%	53,0	47,0	35,6	35,6	28,8
	N*	20457	18158	83694	83730	67796
Age	<30	0,0	**38,8**	0,0	0,6	**76,3**
	30-44	27,3	**52,4**	**100,0**	14,3	23,7
	45+	**72,7**	8,8	0,0	**85,1**	0,0
Schooling attainment	None	**82,7**	14,1	38,8	55,8	30,5
	Primary	7,8	**24,8**	20,5	16,5	21,4
	Middle	4,8	**28,2**	18,0	11,4	20,3
	Secondary or +	4,7	**32,9**	22,7	16,3	27,8
Economic Activity status	Occupied	41,1	**60,4**	**100**	67,1	**76,8**
	Retired	**3,3**	0,0	0,0	13,1	0,0
	Not occupied	**55,6**	39,6	0,0	19,8	23,2
Marital status	Single	1,3	**44,7**	0,0	2,3	**61,8**
	Monogamous /FU	18,7	**37,7**	**100**	71,2	38,2
	polygamous	7,7	2,0	0,0	21,6	0,0
	Widow / Divorced	**72,3**	15,6	0,0	4,9	0,0

Living Conditions and Sex of Household Heads

As seen in Figure 2, the sub-group of female household heads (Gf2) is distinguished from the four other sub-groups and appears that this group has the biggest change to have households that belong to a class of "high" living conditions, which is very high. The sub-group of male household heads (Gh2) is also the closest to belonging to a "high" living conditions class compared to the two other sub-groups of men and the sub-group of women Gf1, but we can also see that, at the same time, it also shows that it is close to a "low" level of living conditions.

The sub-group of female household heads (Gf1) has households that has the lowest living conditions in the capital. This sub-group is the closest group to the "low" level. The two other groups of male household heads (Gh1 and Gh3) are mainly made up of middle class.

Graph 1 : Relationship between sex of the household and Household Living Conditions
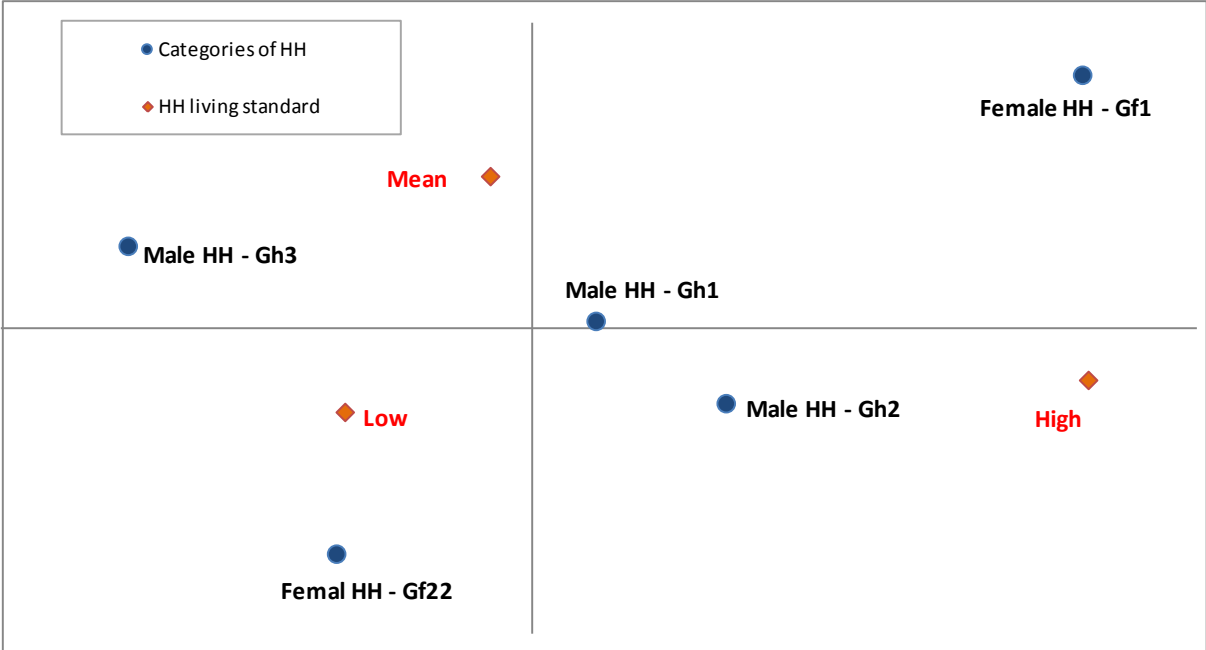
Conclusion

This study is based on an original statistical approach that uses principal components analysis and cluster analysis to compare male and female household heads in Ouagadougou and their level of poverty. The results show that the group of female household heads appears to be specific compared to the group of male household heads. It also shows a heterogeneity in the category of female household heads that surpasses their *legal* status (de facto or de jure), but that encompasses social class and life cycle (influence of age and marital status). Concerning the level of poverty, the analyses also show that, overall, female household heads are not poorer than male household heads but that widows and their households appear to be more fragile.