



Gender and the management of household economy in urban families in the CITY of Bouaké (Côte d'Ivoire)

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Abstract

The question of gender is a major issue in the distribution of social roles between men and women in conjugal responsibilities in Côte d'Ivoire. In this sense, the hegemonic position of the man in the home has undergone a kind of equalisation in favour of the woman in the city of Bouaké. Henceforth, both sexes interact either in a concerted manner or in a particular way for the common well-being of the household. Thus, in a socio-anthropological approach, we will discuss the singularity of the relationship between men and women in the economic demands of the family in this urban city. Our approach to the development of this study is quantitative and qualitative in order to identify to some extent the nodes of meaning and supporting statistics generated by the survey.

Keywords: Gender, management, family economy, urban household

Introduction

The existing literature on gender issues in contemporary societies often focuses on the emancipation of the so-called « weaker sex » (Simone de Beauvoir, 1949; Michel Foucault, 1975; Judith Butler, 1990; Gayle Rubin, 1975; bell hooks, 2000). This empirical approach, however, is itself imbued with certain preconceived assumptions. In contrast, some scholars present a more socialized understanding of gender (Carol Gilligan, 1982; Judith Lorber, 1994; Mary Pipher, 1994; Raewyn Connell, 1995; Michael Kimmel, 2008). It is this latter perspective centered on the social construction of gender roles that best aligns with the reflection raised by the interaction between men and women within households in the city of Bouaké. The respective positions of men and women in this urban setting reflect, in many ways, the broader national situation regarding gender relations. Two major phases have shaped the diachronic evolution of social roles between the sexes in Ivorian society. The first is a transitional phase, characterized by the gradual abandonment of traditional gender attributes. In this process, schooling has served as the key institution for balancing social values between men and women. The second phase represents the long-term effects of educational initiatives implemented by the State over the past three decades. As a result, men and women are now generally perceived as holding equal status across various spheres^[1] of national life.

In Bouaké, gender dynamics within the family framework take on specific forms depending on the household's socioeconomic status. First, there are cases in which both partners, occupying similar professional positions, contribute either equally or unequally to the financial management of the household. Second, professional disparities between spouses may lead to a legitimate or unjustified redistribution of family responsibilities in favor of one partner. Third, unemployment affecting either spouse often compels the other whether man or woman to assume the full burden of the family's economic needs.

In light of these observations, the following question emerges: How is the gendered distribution of economic responsibilities organized within urban households in

Bouaké? Accordingly, this study seeks to understand the nature and balance of conjugal responsibilities between men and women in households within the city of *Gbêkê*^[2].

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques. In accordance with the study's objective, the aim is to capture the quality and depth of responses emerging from the socioeconomic experiences of spouses within households. The selection of research sites^[3] was guided by a categorization of households based on professional status and residential location. Accordingly, three neighborhoods in the city of Bouaké were selected: Ahouanssou, Air-France, and Kennedy. For data collection, two primary techniques were employed : the semi-structured interview and the questionnaire. These data collection techniques led us to interview ten couples (10) in each neighborhood, representing a total of thirty (30) men and thirty (30) women.

The collected data were analyzed through the theoretical frameworks^[4] of the sexual division of labor (Ann Oakley, 1974) and the Asymmetric Gender Substitutability Theory (Paula England, 2005), both applied within a socioeconomic perspective.

Results

1. Regulation of Household Economy in Families with Gender-Equitable Professional Activity

1.1 Cultural Determinants of the Distribution of Economic Roles within Households

This study focuses on a typology^[5] of respondents who adhere to the practices and perceptions specific to certain cultural groups in Côte d'Ivoire. In short, in the city of Bouaké, our empirical approach allowed us to work with spouses of Akan, Krou, and Mandé origin. We will thus designate each respondent by cultural pseudonyms specific to these mentioned cultural areas. In this sequence, we consider the first couple concerned by this empirical approach as heterogeneous. This is Mr. and Mrs. DAGO,

the man is of Bété cultural origin and the woman is of Malinké origin. They are therefore Krou and Mandé, respectively. Mr. DAGO presents the frame of reference for his economic behaviour in the couple in these terms: « In our Krou culture, the community is the priority in households. The family therefore draws its origin from the village. Consequently, my family expenses necessarily take into account the fathers, mothers, cousins, and nephews of the extended family ». As for Mrs. DAGO, she expresses her cultural logic of the family economy with these words: « In our cultural area, we have an inclusive conception of the family. That is to say, there is another definition of the family that is very different from the Western one. As such, our parents, our uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, and offspring constitute the essential links of the household ». Next, the second spouses we present in this context are homogeneous. This is Mr. and Mrs. KOUASSI. The spouses presented here are of Akan origin. They are originally from the rural area of Bouaké. The man of the family, Mr. KOUASSI, paints the economic behaviour of the spouses in the family with these words: « The principle of matrilineality is fundamental in the economic management acts of the family. It is a constraint that obliges us to subscribe to the support of the nephew in the regulation of the family. Except for this requirement, our children represent the priority in household management ». Mrs. KOUASSI elaborates in the same logic, « My husband forgets to specify that it is the nephew, the son of his aunt, the younger sister of his father. His nephew is our child because there is no distinction between him and our children. Mr. KOUASSI is the product of such a cultural practice. He ensures its reproduction and transmission within our current household ». The cultural motives for family organisation, where the man and the woman contribute through similar or coalescing characteristics to co-constructed initiatives in households, lead us to gauge the social factors underlying such synchronisation.

1.2 Social Determinants of Economic Management in Households

The different situations exposed correspond to social contexts that establish the economic habits of spouses in Bouaké households. First, in the case of the DAGO couple, the pre-eminence of communal values shared by the man and the woman in the regulation of their household emerges. Thus, the social reasons that motivate the practices within the DAGO home are related to a form of belief in the ontological immutability of the extended family. In this context, the economy of the nuclear family in their charge is not a question of planning by the man and the woman in the household but of a transcendental will. Therefore, taking into account the needs of the extended family in household regulation is a matter of obedience to the divine will that instituted the family. Mr. DAGO recounts the content of this logic specific to the Krou community with these expressions: « Among us Bété, the family existed at the beginning of men's life on earth. The family is anterior to man; it precedes the individual. It is the family that gives man the values that establish his personality. It is also the family that ensures his life on earth and prepares him for death ». Mrs. DAGO says she shares this same conviction because it is similar to that of the Malinkés. Furthermore,

she illustrates her argument with these words: « In the Malinké culture, it is not up to men to worry about the various vital needs of their existence. In this sense, the prosperity linked to the socioeconomic living conditions of the household is fully assured when the spouses do not discriminate between the needs of the nuclear and extended family ». In a completely different register, the social reference that conditions the KOUASSI couple lies in the influence of socialisation values inherited by the adult within their home. In this perspective, it is the father who transmits to the son or the nephew the values of household economic regulation. Similarly, the woman carries the same vocation. Such practices therefore result in a social reproduction of family management habits from father to son and mother to daughter. In short, this is what Mr. KOUASSI reports in his words : « Since our childhood, we have been instructed on the knowledge of our parents concerning the regulation of the conjugal economy. We also have the moral obligation to perpetuate this education according to whether the order is paternal or maternal. In light of this, priority is given to matrilineal values ».

1.3 Economic Determinants of Conjugal Needs Regulation

In the practical case of our study, we focus on the survey data related to the gross monthly salary of the man and the woman in the households according to the register of the respondents presented and the chapters of monthly expenses. Above all, we first expose the cultural motives driving these economic commitments.

▪ The DAGO Family Case

Current expenses in the DAGO family are based on the cultural heritage of the man and the woman. In this sense, Mr. DAGO has assigned himself, through the scheme of social reproduction linked to the transmission of paternal values, the role of head of the family unit. Mrs. DAGO sees no inconvenience in this. Above all, she reinforces her husband's hegemonic posture by recognising the same cultural values of the social roles assigned to men and women. In accordance with this gendered posture, the register of economic commitments specific to the man concerns the financial regulation of first-order needs in the family's daily life, such as: rent, health, mobility, security, equipment, and real estate. Second-order needs are covered by the woman. These include food, family governance, and leisure activities. Mr. DAGO outlines the nature of his economic responsibilities in these terms: « I am the descendant of family practices specific to the values instilled by my father. Thus, I have the obligation to pay the rent, to care for my wife, fathers, mothers, brothers and nephews, to ensure the children's travel to school, to pay the bills, to take out insurance, to furnish the house, and to save for the construction of our future home ». Mrs. DAGO: « The management of the home is a fine family heritage. No oppression, my husband naturally takes charge of the significant needs of the family. As for me, I help him in this initiative by taking into account the costs of food, the servant's salary, clothing, and the children's outings ». Here is a synoptic table of the gross monthly incomes and expenses of Mr. and Mrs. DAGO.

Summary table of monthly income and expenses declared by the DAGO couple

	Mr. Dago	Mrs. Dago
Monthly IncomeGross (declared)	525,000 F CFA	350,000 F CFA
Household expenses	345,000 F CFA	150,000 F CFA
Report on Expenses and Income in Percentages	65,71%	42, 85%

Sources : our surveys, August and September 2022

▪ **The KOUASSI Family Case**

The primary motive for the economic regulation of the household in the KOUASSI family is driven by the sociocultural tradition specific to the AKAN ethnic group. Thus, the economic needs of the family are expressed in priority out of respect for the matrilineal order. Practically, the nephews of the maternal lineage occupy a prominent place in the handling of the household's financial needs. Subsequently, attention is paid to the children of the nuclear family. However, some adjustments are applied in the order of the KOUASSI family's economic needs. Thus, the nephews and the children are governed by the same standard. Clearly, there is no leveling in the financial support of the children within the household for the KOUASSIs. The nephews of the maternal lineage and the offspring of the KOUASSI couple enjoy equal treatment. In light of tradition, Mr. and Mrs. Kouassi have opted for the collegiate sharing of economic commitments in the home. Concretely, the man is responsible for the first-order charges such as rent, schooling, care, and real estate savings. While the woman is in charge of food, mobility, children's clothing, and household savings. In this sense, Mr. Kouassi presents the state of his arrangements through these phrases: «I am concerned about respecting the values of my tradition. However, it is important for me to treat my nephews and my offspring impartially; All are my children. Also, due to the fact that my wife and I share the same cultural values, we mutually help each other in the economic management of the household's expectations». Mrs. KOUASSI adds in these terms: « My husband and I carry the obligations of the household by prioritising our similarities to the detriment of our inconveniences. I hold the same administrative functions as my husband. Also, we share a common sociocultural origin. Our idea of a couple is fusion because unity is strength ».

Summary table of the monthly income and expenses reported by the Kouassi couple

	Mr. Kouassi	Mrs. Kouassi
Monthly Income Gross (declared)	385,000 CFA	385,000 CFA
Household expenses	215,000 CFA	180,000 CFA
Report on Expenses and Income in Percentages	55, 84 %	46, 75%

Sources: our surveys, August and September 2022

Family Economy Regulation of Households with Professional Activity Specific to the Man or the Woman

1. Categories of Households with Professional Activity Specific to the Man or the Woman

The second register of our respondents consists of households with unique economic income. More precisely, there are two types of couples responsible for regulation in the households concerned by our study. In a first order, it is the household in which the man alone largely covers the

needs of the family. It recurrently emerges in such a situation that the man has the advantage of taking a prominent place in covering the household's needs due to his proven professional situation.

- Either he works as a state agent or civil servant.
- Or he is an executive or personnel in private professional organisations.

Regardless of the type of male professional actor surveyed, the observation of the sociocultural determinants of economic engagement in the home remains the same. Rightly, we retain two scenarios in this movement.

1. **Primo:** The man has a remunerated professional function in the public or private sector, and the woman acts as a housewife.
2. **Secundo:** The man performs a professional activity in the public or private professional sector, and the woman is involved in primary sector activities, specifically commerce, sewing, and hairdressing.

Furthermore, we expose a different context in which the preponderant role falls to the woman. Also, just as in the previous case relating to the socio-professional posture and obligations, the woman is required for different^[6] reasons to ensure the economic commitments of large or medium scope in the households. Logics specific to each category of couples inventoried during our surveys emerge. They mainly report the cultural and economic motivations that define the economic commitments of the man and the woman within the household.

2. Sociocultural Determinants of the Engagement of One Sex in the Economic Roles of the Household

The social orders at stake in the situation of families where one of the two sexes assumes the primacy of economic charges are based on a traditional motive. Clearly, the justifying reasons for the commitment of work income to the economic needs of the home are the result of social, cultural, and religious heritage. Rightly, the testimonies from our surveys echo this. In the context of the first scenario where the man ensures the essential economic commitments in the households, the justifying reason that establishes the investment of his material efforts is the reproduction of socialisation values. Recurrently, a kind of mimicry of previous educational values received by the man during his life emerges. In this sense, Mr. KOTY, one of our respondents fitting this profile, implements this logic with these words: « When I was very young, my father ensured financial and material regularisation. My mother devoted herself solely to household chores. Curious, I questioned my father about the meaning of roles in the couple. He confided in me that it is strictly the man's duty to ensure the preponderance of the conjugal role because this is a matter of respecting the natural order ». In this same context, an appreciation of the values received through

tradition or socialisation is subject to the influence of two contemporary factors: school and the economic crisis in households. Thus, these two motives justify the adoption of another model of inspiration in the management of household needs. In this sense, the will is then childish because the spouses genuinely want to advocate a participatory relationship in the management of the household's economic constraints, but the financial situation of the spouses does not lend itself to this in the majority of cases surveyed in this context. It is the man who holds a comfortable economic position while the woman assumes, at an acceptable level, a compensatory role in the obligations. Mr. KACOU's words are revealing at this level: « One thing explains our currently different social position, and that is money. For me, the money was just enough to finish my studies and get professionally integrated, which was not the case for my wife. We both have a participatory will to regulate the economic needs of the home. But, I can do more and she less. With her profession as a seamstress, she does her best when necessary ». Even though the man is predominantly invested in the majority of situations in covering the economic demands of the family, contingent situations sometimes sabotage this hegemonic posture. Then, the woman takes over the reins of the household through a leverage effect due to marriage. This scenario is observed in the economic precariousness ^[7] of the family where the woman is obliged to take responsibility to avoid the social decay of the household. She is obliged to use her labour or commercial activity in the primary sector to support the family's needs with her modest income. In this regard, Mrs. DJOMAN shares her experience with these words: « For ten years, I have been assuming the needs of the house. This role was not a choice; it was imposed on me after my husband's sudden illness. He was laid off because he is now disabled. So, it is with my income as a fishmonger at the market that I manage food, schooling, and rent. In short, I do everything to avoid dishonour ».

3. Regulation of the Economy of Homes with Unique Professional Activity

We distribute here two financial statements relating to the financial commitments of households. Thus, the first situation relates to families that have regular economic resources. Clearly, this is the household in which the man or the woman has a salaried income. In this context, two scenarios are taken into account. First, the monthly financial balance of the household presented by the KOTY family. Second, the one proposed by the KACOU couple. These two households share a similarity linked to the financial responsibility dedicated to the man. However, the mode of regulation in the KOTY family stems from a social reproduction of parental practices in household know-how. While in the KACOU family, the management of economic tasks is a collegiate initiative. In the second situation, that of Mrs. DJOMAN, it is the woman who holds the preponderance of the household's financial commitments. The economic role devolved to the woman is prompted by an unforeseen event. The role she assumes here is the result of a social obligation. Rightly, we present in order the different typical financial statements for each household.

▪ **Koty Family ^[8]**

Summary Table of Monthly Income and Expenses Declared by the KOTY Couple

	Mr. Koty	Ms. Koty
Monthly Income Gross (declared)	435,000 F CFA	80,000 F CFA
Household expenses	325,000 F CFA	20,000 F CFA
Report on Expenses and In- come in Percentages	74, 71 %	25 %

Sources: our surveys, November and December 2022

▪ **Kacou Famil**

Summary Table of Monthly Income and Expenses Declared by the KACOU Couple

	Mr. Kacou	Ms. Kacou
Monthly Income Gross (declared)	510,000 F CFA	218,000 F CFA
Household expenses	345,000 F CFA	95,000 F CFA
Report on Expenses and In- come in Percentages	67, 64 %	43, 57 %

Sources: our surveys, November and December 2022

▪ **Djoman Family**

Summary Table of Monthly Income and Expenses Declared by the DJOMAN ^[9] Couple

	Mr. Djoman	Mrs. Djoman
Monthly Income Gross (declared)	142,000 F CFA	380,000 F CFA
Household expenses	30,000 F CFA	295,000 F CFA
Report on Expenses and In- come in Percentages	21, 12 %	77, 63%

Sources: our surveys, November and December 2022

Discussion

We focus our analysis on the sociocultural and economic determinants as explanatory values of the conjugal relationships at the origin of responsibilities in the studied households. Our reflection will be subdivided into three main points, corresponding to the categories of households presented in the results: the economic commitments of households with equitable professional activity, those with professional activity specific to one spouse, and finally, those with contingent economic activity. To this end, we seek the theoretical insights of Ann Oakley (1974), Paula England (2005), Juliet Schor (1998), and Nancy Folbre (2001).

1. Economic Commitments in Households with Equitable Professional Activity (DAGO and KOUASSI)

We first evoke the cultural characteristics which appear at first glance as the primary explanatory cause of the economic behaviour of the two sexes in the studied households. In the context of our study, it is clear that the reproduction of the cultural values of the man's ethnic group of belonging in the couple often takes precedence over that of the woman. The first households, the DAGO and KOUASSI couples, demonstrate the real influence of the know-how of their respective cultural groups of belonging on the economic regulation practices of their homes. In this context, it is the man who first echoes the cultural heritage in the provision of family needs. However, we highlight a

form of complicity that leaves the woman with only the role of support for the state of conjugal management. This is particularly evident in the DAGO family, which represents the most evocative case of cultural preponderance in the financial management of the household. The man justifies the economic treatment applied to the nuclear ^[10] and extended family ^[11] by his Krou origin, where the family order extends beyond legal limits. To corroborate this, we are led to draw inspiration from the work of Ann Oakley (1974), who states: "Culture shapes people's perception of their economic role in the family, and the social norms that regulate the financial contribution of each member. This perception determines who controls the financial resources and how these resources are used." The financial statistics confirm this mutual cultural rooting: Mr. DAGO commits 65.71% of his salary, and Mrs. DAGO commits 42.85% of hers. The commitment is commensurate with the mutual cultural rooting in household support.

2. Social and Economic Determinants in Households with Professional Activity Specific to One Spouse (KOTY and KACOU)

We now highlight the social foundations of the economic participation of men and women in the households we studied where one sex is dominant. The KOTY and KACOU families illustrate two models within this category: one based on traditional hegemony, and the other on participatory equity. The KOTY family presents a typical case of the preponderance of the man in household responsibilities, stemming from a social heritage from his father through which the primary family responsibility rests resolutely on the man. This social obligation to hegemonically exercise masculine power in the home is a brake on the balance of roles, and the woman is relegated to the rank of support. Nancy Folbre (2001) supports this, affirming: "The hegemonic power of the man in the home is the product of gender relations that are historically and socially constructed, and which are reinforced by cultural norms, institutional practices, and public policies." Mr. KOTY's significant investment (74.71% of his income) and Mrs. KOTY's minimal contribution (20%) confirm the sexual marking of responsibilities. In contrast, the KACOU couple illustrates a more participatory management influenced by the educational values of school, which promotes gender equality. Mr. KACOU notes: "We both have a participatory will to regulate the economic needs of the home." Their mode of regulating commitments relies on a collegiate initiative where financial value reflects the equality of the two sexes. In this vein, Juliet Schor (1998) affirms: "True gender equality in family life requires redefining domestic and care tasks, so that women and men can work and raise children equally, both having comparable paid and unpaid working hours." The financial contributions of Mr. KACOU (67.64%) and Mrs. KACOU (43.57%) are close to the median value of their incomes, making this gender equality apparent.

3. Regulation of the Economy in Households with Contingent Economic Activity (DJOMAN)

Finally, we present a situation that is almost the opposite of the models analysed so far: the DJOMAN family, where the financial regulation is a prerogative of contingencies. A health event compromised Mr. DJOMAN's capacity to work, leading to a role reversal where the woman assumes

the primary posture in the financial obligations. This substitution, not being a choice but being "imposed on me after my husband's sudden illness," highlights the role of marriage as a founding principle of this spontaneous assumption of responsibility. Mrs. DJOMAN demonstrates an acceptance of the transfer of financial authority, using her income as a fishmonger to manage almost all family expenses, declaring: "I do everything to avoid dishonour." This requires a resilient undertaking from the woman. The financial statements clearly reflect this new arrangement: the woman's financial contribution is estimated at 77.63% of her monthly income, while the man's is minimal (21.12% of his pension). This situation leads us to affirm unequivocally that the predestination of social roles between genders is an illusion. Paula England (2005) attests to this with the maxim: "Women are capable of replacing men in terms of financial contribution to the family, but men are not capable of replacing women in terms of domestic contributions." The woman has as much ability to regulate the economic burdens of the home as the man.

Conclusion

All in all, this study reveals that the financial behaviour of spouses in households in the city of Bouaké is dependent on the sociocultural origin and the socio-professional contingencies of the spouses. The gender-related theories we solicited allow us to retain the subsequent lessons. In this sense, when the man and the woman share common cultural values of family regulation, the spouses' economic commitments are more substantial and diversified to the different living components of the genealogical lineage. However, in cultural orders where the power of regulation is attributed to the man, household expenses are largely covered by him. Above all, it is a question of asserting his authority in the sharing of responsibilities that commits him to the woman. It happens that the values of gender equality are shared by the spouses through the educational values of school. Then, in this type of household, the financial commitment for the management of the family's economic constraints is participatory and equitable according to the spouses' income level.

Furthermore, a different order appears when health eventualities invalidate the man's contributory aptitude to household expenses. In such a scenario, it is the woman who assumes the substitution by taking charge of both the economic commitments of the home and the management of household chores. Thus, we are able to understand that the quality of the participation of the man and the woman in the household does not reside only in the financial contribution but also in the management of household activities.

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15. The various domains concerned include the social, political, and economic spheres. Indeed, Côte d'Ivoire witnessed the emergence of its first female intellectuals and political figures as early as the 1980s. Today, there is a growing number of women almost as many as men occupying similar positions and responsibilities across the country's different sectors of activity.
16. The term « City of Gbêkê » refers to the original identity of the city of Bouaké. Indeed, this urban center was once a village belonging to the Gbêkê family, a prominent Baoulé lineage that settled in the central region of Côte d'Ivoire shortly after the country's initial population movements. Since then, the area has undergone significant transformation, eventually becoming the second largest city in the nation.
17. The door-to-door survey conducted in ten households across the neighborhoods of Ahouanssou, Air-France, and Kennedy enabled us to establish a socio-professional typology of residents. The similarities and differences observed among these households led us to present in this study only the most relevant and illustrative cases. At this stage, it became evident that no single social status could be exclusively associated with any given neighborhood. Across all three study areas, we found households composed of civil servants, entrepreneurs, traders, and unemployed individuals.
18. In addition to these two authors, we will cite in our analyses Juliet Schor (1998) and Nancy Folbre (2001), whose work is intertwined with the theories of the two main authors.
19. It is necessary to categorize the partners who participate equally in the economic solicitations within their households.
20. Women, whether state employees, agents in private enterprises, traders, or entrepreneurs, are predominantly involved in the economic regulation of the household. The explanatory reasons fall into two categories; These are households where the man is in a situation of unemployment related to dismissal, job search, or illness.
21. In a minority of cases, it is women who take on the leadership role in financial responsibilities, either because the man is affected by a health-related disability or because he is professionally inactive. Typically, these are redundancies that occur during their professional careers.
22. The financial statement presented by Ms. KOTY is based on the profit margin of the fruit and vegetable stall she operates daily.
23. Mr. DJOMAN's income was presented to us by his partner. According to these statements, Mr. DJOMAN receives a monthly health insurance premium corresponding to the amount specified in the table. This money is primarily dedicated to the care of her husband. However, she withdraws 30,000 F, which she allocates to household bills.
24. This refers to the nuclear family, consisting of the two spouses and the biological children.
25. Within the scope of this study, the focus is on the identity family, which is a reconstituted family unit taking into account the spouses, biological children, adopted children, grandparents, cousins (male and female), nephews, and nieces. In short, it is the combination of the nuclear and extended family, as we have already stated.