RESEARCH ARTICLE

GENDER AND FAMILY EDUCATION: SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF SOME STUDENTS IN THE COMMUNE OF ADJARRA (BENIN)

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ABSTRACT

Gender and gender equality issues are a current concern in Africa. They raise different perspectives and interpretations and go beyond the simple biological distinction between man and woman. Gender is influenced by factors such as culture, society, history, social norms. Indeed, from its first moments of socialization, the individual is assimilated to sexual behaviors established and imposed by the social norms of his environment. Family education is one of the vectors of reproduction of these beliefs, opinions and knowledge. It is in this dispute that this study is conducted to analyze the impact of sociocultural realities on family education and its impact on gender-related social representations among students of the National Institute of Physical and Sports Education (INEPS) and the Faculty of Letters, Languages, Arts, and Communications (FLLAC) in the commune of Adjarra in Benin. The documentary research, the questionnaire and the interviews formed the basis of the research methodology. Analysis of the data reveals that socio-cultural norms create gender roles and stereotypes that are transmitted from parents to children through family education. Therefore, the education received by these students has a negative effect on their representations of gender. It is then the sum of opinions, knowledge and beliefs specific to a culture, a category or a social group and related to objects of the social environment.

INTRODUCTION

Socially constructed, social roles and stereotypes concerning the feminine and masculine are often institutionalized, integrated into mentalities and cultures, conveyed by the family, education and institutions. All over the world, they are characterized by inequalities, the vast majority of which are to the detriment of women. In particular, men are dominant in terms of power and decision-making at the political and economic level (Association adequacy, 2009, 5). Africa is a continent with diverse historical and cultural experiences, and diverse political, economic and social contexts. In the majority of African countries, it is possible to outline an inventory of gender in all its complexity and contradictions. A UNESCO report on gender equality in sub-Saharan Africa states that " *the perpetuation of inequalities in income, health and education is linked to complex combinations of social norms and discriminatory service delivery patterns...* (2017, 22). Indeed, marginalized for too long, the issue of gender has slowly imposed itself in the various discourses circulating in Africa. Referring to the historical, cultural and social construction of sex (Fougeyrollas-Schwebel *et al*, 2003), the social arrangements of sexual difference (Scott, 1986) or the performative acts that "make gender"

(Butler, 2005; West, Zimmerman, 1987), gender accounts for the principles and modes of construction of femininities and masculinities and serves as the basis for the hierarchy of the sexes. Nevertheless, awareness at the state level recognizes gender equality and women's empowerment as priority objectives in Africa's new narratives and scenarios for structural transformation and sustainable development aimed at achieving inclusive and diversified growth (African Union Commission, 2015). Thus, "In Africa, the study of gender relations and women's power are at the heart of the evaluation of development efforts" (Stamp 1990, 16). In order to overcome biological differences, gender places women and men in a dimension that is socially constructed from birth and that assigns them to a given social order (Fanchini & Morlaix, 2021, 4). At the end of a process of primary socialization (Gendron, 2006 ; Rollet-Echalier *et al*, 2014), if we reason in terms of skills and capital (Morlaix & Fanchini, 2018, 11-12), behavioural and emotional attributes are thus developed from childhood, and the skills constituting emotional capital, for example, are acquired from primary socialization, within the family, and then through contact with other social spheres that reproduce social gender stereotypes. In addition, early childhood is a very important period where the role of parents

is essential in the development of the young child. Baudelot & Establet (2007, 8) would say that "far from being a natural given, belonging to a gender is the product of a construction", so that one is not born a boy or a girl, but one becomes one gradually and thanks to a multitude of factors. Parents are the main agents of this construction because, as Calleau (2013, 10) corroborates: "they contribute to imposing models, try to make the child produce behaviors that conform to the social definition." In the Beninese context, gender is the subject of various representations that place the masculine and feminine in different social roles where men exercise domination. The current situation reveals persistent inequalities between men and women in terms of access to basic social services (education, health, social action), justice (non-respect of women's rights), resources (employment, finance, land, capacity building) and decision-making bodies (UNDP Benin, 2023, 03). Social, cultural and traditional practices that are very often restrictive for women, preserved by ethnic groups and in families (Fourn, 2011, 10), are factors that promote gender inequality. Despite globalization, feminism and the formal education experienced by the younger generations, which allow us to understand the importance of the role of women in all fields, the fact is that the social representation of gender of an individual with a high level of education, such as a student, does not really differ from that of an uneducated person. We can therefore see the weight that socio-cultural realities and family education have on the perception of gender. The present study therefore proposes to analyze the influence of socio-cultural realities on family education and its impact on social perceptions related to gender among students of the National Institute of Physical Education and Sports (INEPS), the Faculty of Letters, Languages, Arts, and Communications (FLLAC) in the commune of Adjarra in Benin. The study is based on two hypotheses: Socio-cultural realities influence family education; This family education helps shape the beliefs, opinions, and gender-related knowledge of INEPS and FLLAC students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data Collected: This work is based on joint surveys conducted in two entities of the University of Abomey Calavi (UAC) whose geographical location is in the municipality of Adjarra. Each entity offers training in a variety of fields. The students of each of its entities are not mostly indigenous but come mostly from rural areas where the impact of socio-cultural realities is still very present, such as in Adjarra. The vast majority of the inhabitants of Adjarra are uneducated, given the rural character of the locality. Data collection took place between March and May 2023. The target of this study is heterogeneous. Indeed, the survey population chosen for the research is composed of three target groups: INEPS and FLLAC students; parents; customary or religious leaders. As it was not possible to survey the target population in its entirety, sampling was carried out.

At the sampling stage, two techniques were used. This is the technique of reasoned choice and accidental choice. The accidental choice is used for students because this sample contains only those students (135) who have kindly completed the survey questionnaire made available to them. The student category is the only one that has been subjected to a questionnaire. The choice was made to use a digital solution for the collection of quantitative data. Thus, the targeted

students received a link to a website on which they had the opportunity to fill in and submit the questionnaire on the Internet. Far from being a coincidence, this choice is based on reasons deemed relevant. It saved time and allowed data collection to be done without worrying about geography. The questionnaire was designed and deployed with the KoboCollect solution. It contains questions relating to the objectives of the study. Also implemented for parents, the technique of accidental choice made it possible to take into consideration the subjects available during the fieldwork and belonging to the category mentioned. Mainly for traditional or religious leaders, the reasoned choice is used taking into account not only the reliability of the information provided by the targets but also its accuracy. Semi-structured interviews (19) were conducted with parents from households in the commune of Adjarra (16) and customary or religious leaders (03) who agreed to meet with us. These interviews revolved around themes such as knowledge and attitudes about gender, parents' educational practices, as well as the impact of social and cultural burdens on gender representations. The guide for customary or religious leaders had the particularity of addressing perspectives for more egalitarian and inclusive customary and religious practices. These interviews were recorded with an iPhone. It was agreed with the respondents that complete anonymity would be respected in the use of their words for the presentation of the research results. Moreover, their identification would not bring any information to the research.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Survey Target Population

Target Categories	Provenance	Sampling Techniques	Waist
Students	INEPS	Accidental Choice	62
	FLLAC		73
Parents	Adjarra	Accidental Choice	16
Customary or religious leaders	Adjarra	Reasoned choice	03
Total			154

Source: Field data, April 2023

Data Processing Methods: As the data collected were of different natures, the processes for processing them were rightly different. Quantitative data was first extracted from the KoboCollect platform. The resulting database was then inserted into Excel 2013 for audit. With the database now free of all superfluities, it was transferred to IBM SPSS software, version 17 where it was processed. As for the qualitative data, the recordings made were transcribed using Word 2013 and structured according to the themes addressed and the recurrences detected in the verbatims. Given the anonymity agreed with the respondents, their words will be presented not with their names, but with codes. Thus, "PAR 01" refers to the first parent surveyed and so on, as does "RESPO 01" which represents the first customary or religious leader met.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Impacts of socio-cultural realities on family education: Behavioural and emotional attributes develop in childhood, and are acquired from primary socialization within the family, and then through contact with other social spheres that reproduce social gender stereotypes (Morlaix & Fanchini, 2018, 11-12). The social environment to which one belongs thus has a real impact on the education transmitted to the individual. Figure 1 shows the importance given to women in the educational environment of the students surveyed.
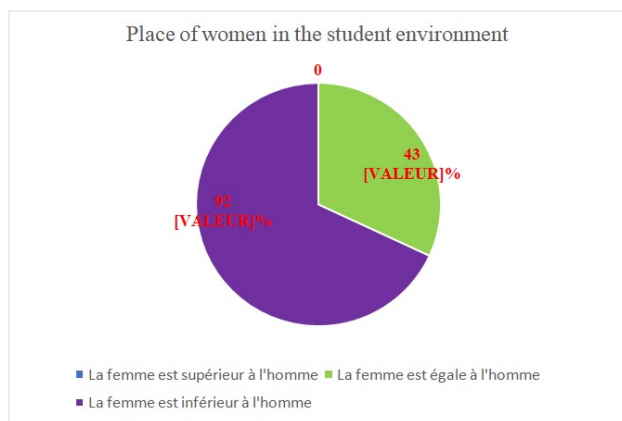
Source: Field data, April 2023

Chart 1. Women's place in the student's educational environment

This graph shows that more than a majority of students believe that women are not considered equal to men in their environment. This is what this parent says: "That men are superior to women is not a new fact. In any family, the man is the head, followed by the woman. It is the woman who takes care of the children and must inform the head of the family about everything that happens" (PAR 01, April 2023). They were mostly raised in a patriarchal and hierarchical society (Kiki, 2021, 2). In this gender system, the masculine is systematically valued to the detriment of the feminine, not only materially but also symbolically (Opériol, 2018, 84). These results corroborate those of Fourn (2011, 10), who argues that Beninese society does not grant women decision-making power. In this regard, one of the religious leaders surveyed stated that: "The man is superior, and in providing everything over the woman, this is the observation that is made. But the one who is truly a Christian is not going to live in this way by considering the woman subordinate to him. There is a passage from Leviticus (Old Testament) that says *«the man is the head of the family, he is the leader, he does not supplant his wife* "; in such a way that when he wants to perform an act, he must take into account the opinion of his wife" (RESPO 01, Field data, April 2023). This inferiority attributed to women is reinforced by the socio-cultural realities of each milieu. There is inequality between men and women; an inequality that has long been maintained and reinforced by traditional culture (Fourn, 2011, 10). The relationship between women and men is therefore represented as systems of opinions, knowledge and beliefs specific to a culture, a category or a social group (Rateaux and Lo Monaco, 2013, 3). These representations of gender therefore depend closely on the culture and social group to which the individual belongs. This is in line with Thery's (2010) view that gender is a social and cultural experience. In the same vein, according to Gastineau and Adjamagbo (2022, 5), the social norms that prevail in Benin impose a strict division of roles and responsibilities between the two sexes: the man must provide for the financial needs of the household, while the woman is responsible for domestic work and childcare.

Family education as a source of misrepresentation of gender: With regard to the configuration of the percentages, it is found that the family education received by FLLAC and INEPS students has repercussions on their representations of gender. Table 2 addresses the issue of gender equality in the exercise of roles and responsibilities.

Table 2. Potential for Women to Perform the Same Roles as Men

Variables	Number of employees (n)	Percentages (%)
Yes	61	45,2
Not	74	54,8
Total	135	100,0

Source: Field data, April 2023

This table shows that of the 135 subjects surveyed, the majority (74) of women could not have the same roles and responsibilities as those attributed to men. It is thus clear that for literate and well-educated subjects, women cannot occupy the same place as men in society and are thus relegated to second place. This observation is also made at the level of this female parent who literally evokes that: "The man is the leader, the head. Two blind people cannot walk together. He must have a clairvoyant to guide the blind in order to avoid pitfalls Tags: So it is the man who guides the woman" (PAR 02, April 2023). It is noticeable from this statement that women are not considered to have equal dignity with men. One of the religious leaders adds: "There are roles that are already naturally assigned to men or women. This is not to say that some tasks are exclusively for women and others for men. In some settings, women already do the same tasks as men" (RESPO 01, April 2023). For Pasche (2021, 13), it is a relationship of power, of domination. These social relations between women and men, which are constantly changing and evolving according to time and context, are marked, in all regions of the world, by a hierarchy and inequalities to the detriment of women (Association Adequation, 2017, 4). Gender refers to a division of the roles assigned to men and women and the psychological attributes and belief systems associated with them. But it also refers to a hierarchical and asymmetrical social relationship. It is therefore important to look at the reasons that make the roles and social relations assigned to men and women unequal to the detriment of women. Table 3 shows the reasons for the inequality of gender roles.

Table 3. Reasons for the unequal roles of women and men

Variables	Number of employees (n)	Percentages (%)
Women are weaker than men	19	25,7
Woman has more duties to the family than man	46	62,2
Women lead badly	09	12,2
Total	74	100,0

Source: Field data, April 2023

Of this table, 62.2% of the students consider women to be incapable of assuming responsibilities in the same way as men because they have more duty towards the family. Thus, these results are in line with those of Lépinard and Lieber (2020, 43) for whom it is the appropriation, devaluation and social non-visibility of women's work that are the primary site of production and exercise of male domination. This division is decisive for gender relations. While women are assigned to reproductive and domestic work, which is low value-added work (from an economic and symbolic point of view), productive work, which has high added value, is reserved for men. These results also support Fourn's (2011, 10) analysis of Beninese society, where being a mother above all else is the best way to define the social status of women in Benin. Thus, called upon to fully play its role as a breeder, it is made to stay at home. "Gnonnu Xuessi, Sunnu Glégbénu", an expression consecrated in "Fon", a language of the country to express the

demarcation between the domestic, family and private sphere, which is the house reserved for women, and the public sphere reserved for men. Moreover, it can be inferred that in professional activity, social gender relations result in forms of de-skilling of women's skills. (Lépinard and Lieber, 2020, 45).

In this sense, a parent states: "The responsibilities naturally assigned to women are different from those of men. Even if we took a woman to digest, she would not be able to succeed as a man would. She needs a man next to her to guide her" (PAR 11, April 2023). These beliefs, opinions and knowledge of students are derived from the parents' educational practices because even though they live together, girls and boys are not raised in the same way (Gaussel, 2016, 6). Women, more than men, would have been educated from childhood to become attentive mothers, competent housewives, women attentive to the maintenance of their households (Buscato 2019, 68). In this regard, one of the parents surveyed told us that: "For domestic chores, the woman must necessarily be the one to do it. That's reserved for him. Otherwise, once she is with her husband, she will not be able to stay in this home, it will be said that she has been badly educated by her parents" (PAR 14, April 2023).

In addition, it appears that a girl's proper education is limited to reproductive tasks. There are, therefore, relations of domination (by men) and subordination (of women) between men and women, which subjugate women's choices. Indeed, the father and mother of the child, because of their own adherence to and representation of gender roles, present children with differentiated ways of being male or female and thus convey certain models of gender roles (Mieyaa, 2013, 30-31). The family is therefore one of the primary vectors for the construction of gender identities for these students. This is done through the intermediary of parents, who play a major role in the child's socialization process (Calleau, 2013, 9). Figure 3 shows that family education is the cause of students' misrepresentation of gender.
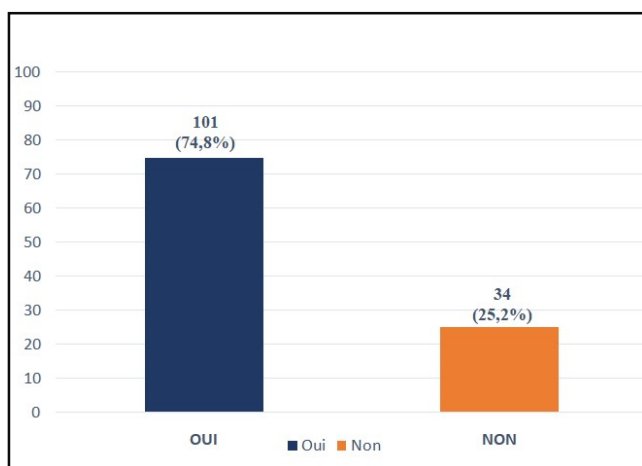

Figure 2. Family education responsible for students' representations of the relationship between the sexes

This graph shows that 101 of the respondents consider the education they received at home to be the basis of their knowledge, beliefs and opinions on the relationship and roles between men and women. Even before the birth of the child, we can record parenting behaviors that sometimes differ depending on the sex of the future baby. Knowledge of the child's sex will already influence parents' behaviour and the expectations they may have (Calleau, 2013, 10). The family is

the child's primary educational and socializing authority. From this point of view, the education of children is first and foremost a transmission of family values, values that will shape the child's personality (Calleau, 2013, 7). Gender socialization thus takes place through the transmission by parents of gender role models in many everyday situations (Rouyer *et al*, 2014, 112). Family education gives the child the first interpretations of the roles they must adopt, the rules they must abide by, and the socially legal behaviors they must put into practice (Kiki, 2021, 3). This finding proves that Théry's (2010) approach according to which children derive their beliefs from parental attitudes, particularly in childhood, is verified in the context of this study.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this work, the analysis of the data revealed that there are indeed representations of gender at the level of each individual surveyed. These results show that the poor influence of family education on gender-related opinions, beliefs and knowledge among INEPS and FLLAC students is partly determined by the socio-cultural realities around them. Far from being isolated conceptions, these representations are the result of the primary socialization of each individual surveyed. The representation that these actors have is then the sum of opinions, knowledge and beliefs specific to a culture, a category or a social group and relating to objects of the social environment. This ensemble shapes the thinking of each actor and defines his line of conduct vis-à-vis his female alter ego. For example, it has been noted that despite the high level of education and knowledge of women's rights, some of these students, both girls and boys, do not give women equal value to men. The same observation was made among the parents interviewed. This way of seeing women in Beninese society is perpetuated from generation to generation through customary and religious traditions that generate stereotypes of roles and relations between the sexes. These gender stereotypes create a hierarchy between the sexes where women find themselves in a situation of dominance.

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