

**POWER DYNAMICS IN HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING –
AN ANALYSIS OF CONCEPTUAL, THEORETICAL AND
EMPIRICAL WORK**

BY

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own original and independent work. All authors and other intellectual materials and sources that have been quoted have been fully acknowledged. I also declare that neither part nor in its entirety has this thesis been published in any form or submitted to another university or institution for the award of a degree.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family



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ABSTRACT

Women's involvement in household decision making is significant. Their participation in household decision making is largely influenced by structural variables such as resource contribution, education, occupation and seniority. However, the lack of clear consensus on which variable improves women's power in the household presents a major problem for our state of knowledge regarding what is significant for policy formulation and development interventions. The study utilizes secondary data of existing literature on women's decision making in the household to aid in establishing which variable(s) are most influential.

Result from the study show the profound role of culture in women's participation in household decision making. To mute the adverse effect of culture, the structural variable, education is identified as influential. This is because education re-orientes traditional notions of gender ideologies, improves opportunities for women's participation in the labour market, and gives them a greater voice in negotiating household decisions. The study further establishes that both the structural perspectives and cultural ideological perspectives provide compelling explanations to household decision making within the African context.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.0 Background

This dissertation presents a conceptual, theoretical and empirical analysis of the power structures and power dynamics that underpin and shape decision-making within the household. It relies on secondary sources of data to explore the various ways in which variables like income contribution, education, age and occupation influence power dynamics and decision outcomes. At the heart of the analyses is an investigation of how these factors affect the capacity or ability of women to influence decisions in patriarchal social environments, where household decision-making is traditionally male-dominated. By patriarchy, I refer to a social system where men are the central authority figures who wield power to influence decision making processes.

1.1 Gender Relations in Africa

To effectively examine women's role in decision making in the household, it is important to discuss gender relations in Africa. Gender relations, in this context, refer to how men and women interact in an attempt to influence decisions. Gender relations are critical in determining structural roles that men and women play in social relations such as household decision making.

Gender functions as an organizing principle for society because of the cultural meanings given to being male or female. This is particularly evident in the division of labour according to gender. In most cases society characterizes gender in concepts of masculinity and femininity. The former is mostly associated with dominance, while the latter, care giving and subservience. Men and women are socialized to perceive

roles as opposite. Thus, while, women are socialized to perform chores and the latter wield a sense of entailment to the dominant role in male-female relationships (Adomaoko Ampofo, 2001; Adomako Ampofo & Boateng, 2008; 2009). These underlining characteristics serve as a guide for intra-household power relations.

While African women are generally perceived as disadvantaged in relation to men, women from the following ethnic groups, that is the Efutu, Akans, and the Gas of Ghana and among the Zomba of Malawi, have all been noted as autonomous (Fortes, 1970; Hagan, 1983; Robertson, 1984; Fayorsey, 1995, Vaughan, 1983; Kathewera-Banda et al., 2011). Agnes Akosua Aidoo (1983) notes that Akan women have a uniquely strong position because the basic legal, economic and political rights of the Akan are defined through feminine principles¹. By law, Akan women can sue and be sued, initiate a divorce on account of a sterile husband, and engage in her own economic activities (such as farming and trading). However, the control and management of the resources of the matrilineage is by the lineage heads who are mostly men. Kwame Arhin (1983) and Kathewera-Banda et al. (2011) have noted that men as a group generally have more rights and privileges than most women. Women's rights and enjoyment of certain privileges are tied to their relationship with men. For instance, Margret Strobel (1982), writing on African women noted that in many patrilineal societies in Africa, land was allocated to males. Women had access to land as daughters and, more securely, as wives. The results of these gender relations are uneven access to resources and decision making processes.

¹ The principle that uphold the notion of matriarchy.

1.2 Women's participation in decision making in Africa.

The 2009 world survey, carried out by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, on the role of women in development indicates that women in many parts of the world continue to face discrimination. This encompasses every sphere of their lives including the household unit. Ironically women hold key positions within the household domain and are responsible for the wellbeing of members within this unit, yet, they are not equipped with the necessary resources for empowerment (such as education, access to and control of resources) to effectively enhance their role at the household level. For instance, Hoddinott and Haddad (1995) found that women's incomes were spent on goods for their children and for collective household consumption, while men spent their incomes on personal forms of consumption such as alcohol, meals eaten out, cigarettes and female companionship. In spite of the key roles played by women within the household, their participation in household decisions is limited. This is because the structure of the household is deeply entrenched in social norms and values (Agarwal, 1997) which are largely patriarchal in nature (Tamale, 2004).

Most household structures seem as though resources are pooled together and redistributed according to the basic decision making rule within the household. This is, however, not the reality (Kabeer, 1994). Empirical research has shown that the sex of the person owning wealth or earning income appears to have a systematic effect on patterns of resource allocation within the household (Clark, 1994; Pahl, 1980; Warren, 2009). The gender-differentiated patterns in the disposal of resources (based on what one contributes) assume an enhanced power position of women in household decision making. The intra-household dynamics of power are, however, affected by factors

such as education, age, occupation, as well as level of income contributions, among others. The interplay of these variables is important in determining the attitude of the household in terms of decision making.

1.3 Problem Statement

Existing literature on household decision making have highlighted challenges that women face and how these challenges influence their power in decision making. These works have attributed women's lack of power to relative gaps in ages between husbands and wives, the non-existence of a functioning social support system to serve as a "fall back" to enhance negotiations; differential levels in educational attainment between husband and wife; and levels of income contributions in the household (Oppong, 1974; Agarwal, 1997, Adomako Ampofo, 1999; GDHS, 2008). The perspective in these studies is that since these factors are known to determine decision making power, they are levers that could potentially be relied upon to improve the stake of women in household decision making, at least in theory. For instance, if a woman achieves a respectable level of education, such as, a PhD, she is likely to achieve a significant rise on her occupational ladder, which results in higher earnings and thus, contributing significant income to the household. Such a woman is more likely to wield greater power, than one who does not possess these levers of influence. The idea is that, these variables affect how she perceives herself and her role such a woman is more confident and feels predisposed to see herself as a major player in the decision making process) as well as how her spouse perceives her. Even the most traditionally conservative of men will be more likely to accord some respect to the views of a spouse with such attributes. A host of empirical findings in the literature have validated the above perspective (United Nations, 1994; GSS, 1999).

The lack of clear consensus on which variable improves women's power in the household creates a gap in knowledge regarding what is significant and what is not, as determinants of women's power in household decision making in a resilience cultural context. It also presents a challenge in terms of targeting interventions and advocacy towards the goal of female empowerment within the household: the efficiency and optimality of conventional interventions may be questionable if they are built on the wrong assumptions.

This study therefore seeks to find some clarity on the determinants of and sources of women's decision making power in the household. It will review and synthesize the various research works on household decision-making by comparing, contrasting as well as analyzing the literature to determine the most influential variable which influences household decision making.

1.4 Objectives

Drawing from existing literature on household decision making, this thesis seeks to examine how four key variables, namely; resource contribution, education, occupation and seniority affect women's power positions in household decision making.

Specifically, it seeks to:

- Establish which variables; resource contribution, education, occupation and seniority) have the most influence on decision making dynamics in the household.
- Examine the relative strength of culture in determining the power structure of the household.

- Examine which theories provide reasonable and acceptable explanations of women's household decision making from an African point of view.

1.5 Methodology

This research is a review of existing literature on women's decision making in the household and therefore it utilizes only secondary data. In line with the set objectives, of the study, I examined four main variables and their relationship with household decision making power. These are education, occupation, income contribution and age difference between spouses in the household. Indeed, these variables are chosen because of their relevance in the women's empowerment process. Additionally, these variables are at the center of modern efforts to advance the cause of women which transcend beyond household decision making. The variables also set the basis for identifying the dynamics of power between spouses in intra-household decisions.

Literature to which examines household decision making and these variables were selected. Sources of literature include published academic and non-academic sources. Most of the literatures reviewed were based on Africa, most from journals such as Feminist Africa, Journal of Pan African Studies and Journal of Marriage. Others sources are selected from East Asia to help establish a basis for comparison of cultural practices.

Using secondary data, on married women, I looked at how women in Africa influenced household decision making such as major purchases, daily household purchases, what food to cook, own health care, children's health care among others in relation to the their level of education, occupation, seniority and level of financial contribution to household disposable income.

1.6 Research Questions

This study seeks to find answers to the following questions which in turn would aid in addressing the above mentioned objectives of the study.

- In what ways do the specified variables (Resource contribution, education, occupation and seniority) influence women's decision making in the household?
- Which variables (Resource contribution, education, occupation and seniority) are most influential to women's household decisions?
- How strong is the role of culture in influencing household decisions?

1.7 Significance of study

The theme of the research –women's roles in household decision making – is one of the most important issues in gender research and interventions towards women's empowerment. This is because engendered decision making is crucial for development. Any significant findings of this study will thus be contributing to a subject with major implications for enhancing the welfare of women in a number of ways such a policy formulation and advocacy.

The central motivation of this study – which is to attempt to synthesize and clarify the state of knowledge on the subject under investigation, is very significant. As noted in the statement of problem, a lack of clear consensus regarding what is significant and what is not in the power dynamics of household decision-making could itself undermine the logic and effectiveness of conventional interventions aimed at women empowerment through the household.

Finally, the specific variables under scrutiny are indeed important and their significance is well understood to transcend decision-making, since they are at the core of the modern efforts to advance the cause of women. By selecting them as the variables for analysis, this study hopes to clarify understanding on the actual relative strengths of the variables in the face of entrenched cultural norms.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

First, any study relying on secondary sources of data as evidence is typically limited by its sources which it cannot control. This study recognizes this key weaknesses in its sole reliance on secondary sources of data for its analysis.

Second, because the various literatures on which this study relies on use of varying approaches and methodologies in their investigations, there is a fundamental challenge how to compare, contrast and reconcile their findings in one common framework. There is an inherent inconsistency in such an approach which may not be easy to resolve and could ultimately limits the author's ability to make broad generalizations.

Finally, time constraints and difficulty with accessing literature have limited, in some significant measure, the original intent to explore a much wider and deeper variety of literature on the subject. Nonetheless, the final output is fairly representative of the essential literature.

1.9 Conceptual Framework

The literature on this work reveals theoretical and ideological differences reflected in the various theories explaining power relations at the household level; however, read together, the literature reveals inequalities between men and women with regard to the variables of education, income contribution, age and occupation. This study is situated in a framework that explains household behavior in relation to economic theories such as exploitative theory, neo-classical theory and bargaining power and social theories such as gender orientation, concept of the hearth-hold and social dominance theory.

Figure 1

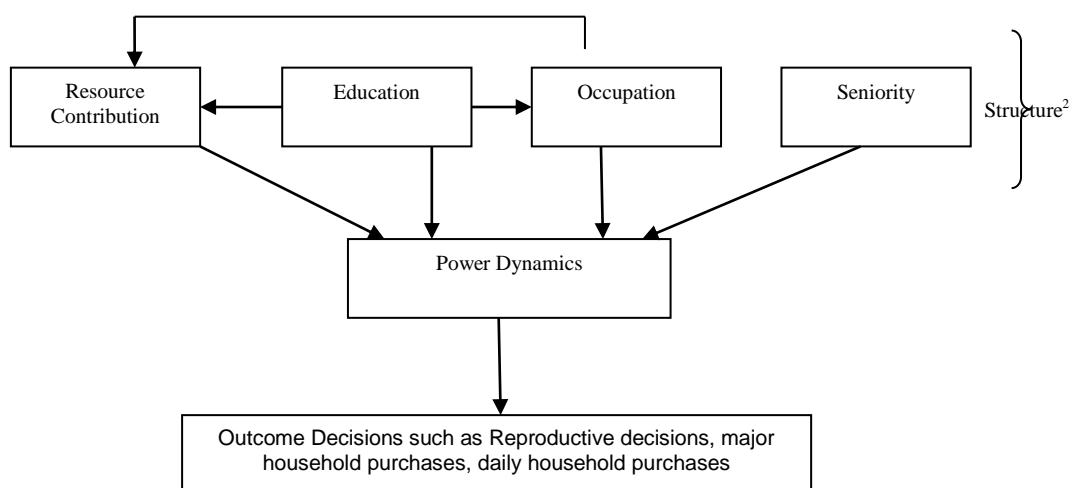


Figure 1, shows a relationship between the four variables namely education, resource contribution, occupation and seniority, which are classified as the factors determining power in the household. Education affects the occupation which in turn affects resource contribution. That is, a woman's education determines her occupation which

² Structure or structural factors refer to how distribution of resources affect status and decision making power. Therefore, education, seniority, occupation and resources contribution are referred to structural factors.

determines her level of contribution of resources in the household. Seniority, however, does not have any sort of relationship with the other variables. The four variables are noted to determine the power dynamics of the household and set the agenda for negotiating intra-household decisions.

Figure one also indicates a possible relationship between occupation and resource contribution – thus a person’s occupation does play a crucial part to resources pooled together for consumption on the part of both spouses. Alternatively, occupation assumes a psychological advantage of a perceived notion of self-worth that allows members to press for decision-making outcomes in their own interest (Oyitso and Olomukoro, 2012; Okojie et al, 2009; Chant and Pedwell, 2008). A person engaged in a respected profession or occupation will be disposed to making decisions in the household, regardless of his income contribution, even in relation to those who may contribute more. The potential positive impact of occupation is utilized as leverage for negotiations and hence, the absence of an occupation or a profession on the part of a spouse may results in an increased level of power for the other spouse.

1.10 Definition of Concepts:

The main concepts in this study are household, power, decision making, and patriarchy

Household

Ardayfio-Schandorf (1997:74) states that the concept of the household may either be a single person household thus, “a person who makes provision for his own food without combining with any other person” or a multi person household thus “a group

of two or more persons who make common provisions for food or other essentials for living. The persons in the group may pool together their incomes and have a common budget to a greater or less extent.” Since the focus of this study is to identify power dynamics between spouses with special reference to resource contribution, education, occupation and seniority, the household shall consist of a head of household (male head), spouse (his wife) and other dependents who all eat from a common pot.

Power

The definition of power varies from one discipline to the other but for the purpose of this work; power is defined from a resource point of view, when a dominant group wields control over material, intellectual, human and financial resources to the disadvantage of a subordinate group. Individual power is gained through the control of these resources. The wielding of power by one dominant group over the other is culturally constructed and becomes the defining parameters for resource distribution and acquisition. For the purpose of this work, resource contribution, education, occupation and seniority are very influential in determining power acquisition. A higher power position in a household is likely to be reflective of higher level of education, higher income contribution, wide age gap between spouses and better occupation.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a cultural construct which defines the parameters for power distribution between men and women within the household. Patriarchy is widely known as the authoritative male system³ which has both oppressive and discriminatory tendencies. The discriminatory factor is associated with access and control of resources by men,

³Authoritative male system is one that is permissive of male dominance

while the oppressiveness of patriarchy is perceived to occur in cultural environments among others. Patriarchy is also characterized by male dominance, male rule and male superiority. Additionally, it perceives the status of female as inferior to male. Patriarchy, however, will be discussed within the context of household structures.

1.11 Organization of the Study

This work is organized in five chapters. Chapter one introduces the study by focusing on the background, problem statement, objectives and significance of the study. The chapter ends with a discussion of the methods utilized in collecting data and the definition of concepts.

Chapter two focuses on the review of conceptual and theoretical literature on decision-making. The chapter analyses the four variables (income contribution, education, occupation and seniority) from various theoretical perspectives in relation to household power structure.

Chapter three focuses on empirical studies on household decision-making and evidence of the effects of income contribution, education, occupation and age on decision making in the household.

Chapter four synthesizes the empirical literature and theoretical literature on decision-making. Chapter five concludes by providing a summary of the major issues arising from the discussions and suggests recommendations.

1.12 Conclusion

Women's role in influencing decisions in the household is an important issue in gender research and intervention for their empowerment. Resource contribution, education, occupation and seniority are important levers to promote women's empowerment. However, the lack of clear consensus on which variable is significant to promoting women's decision making poses a problem for designing interventions targeted at empowering women. Women's role in decision making is crucial for development and therefore having the right solution to empowering women is equally important.

CHAPTER TWO

Conceptual and Theoretical Literature

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews leading theories, concepts, and schools of thought on household decision making. The discussion on theories will include the exploitative theory, neo-classical theory, bargaining theory and social dominance theory, while the concepts will include the perspective on gender orientation and the concept of the hearth-hold.

The reviews are guided by three main questions: how do the theories construct power? What assumptions underlie the theories? What are the strengths and weaknesses of its arguments as an explanation for the power dynamics of household decision-making? In addition to reviewing individual theories on their merit and in relation to the four selected variables (resource contribution, education, occupation and age), the review also attempts to compare and contrast the various schools of thought. Thus, the expected conclusions will be both comparative and synthetic at the same time.

2.1 Women's Resource Contribution in the Household

2.1.1 Economics Perspectives

The neo-classical economics is borne out of classical economics. It introduces concepts such as marginalism and maximization of social welfare which distinguishes it from classical economics. It assumes a stable social force that provides the foundation for equality. Thus, husband and wife's economic efficiency and progress are maximized based on the existence of this equilibrium, through which they are able to maximize their welfare in a free market system. The neo-classical school of thought perceives contenders (household members) of the free market economy as rational

individuals who will make choices in accordance with their self interest. Thus, members within the household all act rationally to maximize their utility.

One of the earliest attempts to explain the power relations in the household from the neo-classical perspective was spearheaded by Gary Becker in his book *A Treatise on the family* (1981). Becker identifies the family as an economic institution that produces and consumes resources from the market economy. He endorses the “traditional family”, where the man is the provider and the woman is responsible for the reproductive work within the household. In this traditional family household (akin to the European household model), Becker asserts the assumption of a consensus on preferences within the family, and manages to avoid the notion of the existence of conflicts in household resource allocation. Indeed, conflict is a reality that exists in real families where individuals have different tastes and different preferences. Therefore the assumption by Backer cannot be wholly true. Indeed, Manuh (2001), writing on Ghanaians living in Toronto, shows how households, conflict is rooted in real and perceived power differences transported across the Atlantic, and in some cases reinvented.

A household without conflict in preferences is most likely to be exploitative in nature. The exploitative theory grounded in the Marxist school of thought posits that, a single individual, typically the head of the family, who is usually the husband, dictates his preferences to the other members of the household. In this household there is no room for negotiating preferences. Power is gained through the control of resources. This power is, however, used at his discretion, resulting in the exploitation of the family members by the husband (Folbre 1986; MaCrate, 1987.) In view of this, household

decision making becomes the sole preserve of the husband. This model is amply depicted in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where the protagonist Okwonkwo rules his household with an iron fist (Achebe, 1958). Described as a stern Ibo man with an intimidating appearance and obsessed with social status – Okwonkwo rises to become a prominent man by virtue hard work. His three wives become the sources of labor for his agricultural activities. There were instances when Okwonkwo beats his second wife; once when she did not come home on time to make his meal and when she referred to him as one of those “guns that never shot”. (p.33)

The neo-classical perspective, additionally, argues that the notion of specialization in European traditional family promotes efficiency by minimizing competition and conflict between husband and wife, and maximizing mutual dependence. Gary Becker further adds that the household unit, jointly pool resources; and decisions of redistribution are facilitated by an absolute but benevolent dictator who heads the household and ensures altruistic decision-making outcomes. Indeed, Aidoo supports this theory to some extent as she argues for complementarity in gender relations in Africa rather than hierarchical relations (Aidoo, 1985).

Critics of this model (Feber 2003; Kabeer, 1994) argue that this model does not fully explain the reality in households. They indicate that the altruistic tendency of the household head is subject to questioning, considering that the neo-classical takes on the rational economic man who is usually concerned with maximizing his own utility in his dealings with others; and is sometimes benevolent within the family unit (Ferber, 2003). This suggests ambivalence or an inconsistency in the position of the rational economic man (Feber 2003; Kabeer, 1994).

2.1.2 Power Perspectives

Feber (2003) adds that the Beckerian notion of interdependence on the basis of specialization is not a depiction of reality. She indicates that specialization indeed does not lead to interdependence, but in reality, it makes full-time homemakers dependent on wage workers – so that in the case of divorce, men are less likely to face serious problems as opposed to their wives who may not easily find jobs to support themselves or may have to settle for low income jobs. Consequently, men's wage contributions to the household economy put women at a disadvantaged position with regards to power to influence change especially in the light of an era when female unpaid and reproductive work is discounted as unproductive (Waring et al., 1995). Kabeer (1994) says the idea of a single utility function obscures the fact that some members of the household lose while others benefit where aggregate utility function increases. Utilizing the notion of single utility function by policymakers, she explains that women's needs and interests have been overlooked in the process – further arguing that the disregard of the dynamics of intra-household relations by development strategists has its risks for women's development as it tends to increase negative consequences such as male bias while consolidating women's subordination, thereby making them economically dependent on men. Ekejiuba (1995) further argues that the notion of the common pot is not useful for many African households. She produces the gender sensitive term “hearth-hold” to replace “household” which she defines as “demographically made up of a woman and all her dependents whose food security she is either fully or partially responsible for”. According to Ekejiuba, the male head of the household has his own land, labor and other resources He contributes to the household but is never solely responsible for the total expenditure of the hearth-hold. In polygynous situation, the head of the household is assured of

periodic food, labor and sexual services from the various hearth-holds of which he forms a part. Thus, the hearth-hold becomes a unit of consumption, production and decision making which depends partly on transfers from other households and whose functions also include socializing the next generation. The relationship between members of the hearth-holds (thus, wife, co-wives, mother-in-law and others) is marked by both solidarity and conflict – as there is competition over the male spouse's contributions.

Indeed, Ekejiuba's concept of the hearth-hold brings to light another perspective on the structure of decision making process. While the head of the household is responsible for taking overall decisions for the entire household, decision making pertaining to the hearth-hold is usually the preserve of the wife. These decisions may include, the food to cook, informal education for children, decision on expenditure and her movement. Though the system of the hearth-hold is akin to polygenous family systems, the concept has been re-constructed to work in nuclear family systems in most African homes. The hearth-hold system is utilized to establish some form of a leverage to influence decisions. For example, in Ghana, women have access to a base contribution from their husbands to provide meals for the household. While it is the woman's responsibility to feed everyone, she is responsible for making decisions on expenditure for that base contribution from her husband (Goldstein, 2000).

An alternative model that challenges Becker's idea of seamless altruism within the household is the bargaining model, deeply rooted in game theory. The bargaining theory assumes that there are different, or possibly conflicting, preferences among family members; and perceives bargaining between family members as a process that

reconciles these differences in preferences. In this model, there are several possible options available to the two parties. Thus, a woman would strike a good bargain for her needs if she makes some level of contribution towards the family income. Cooperative bargaining theory suggests that expenditure decisions are proportional to resource contributions (Manser and Brown 1980; McElroy and Homey 1981). This therefore indicates a direct correlation between a woman's contributions and her bargaining power – so that if she contributes more, she has a better chance of influencing decisions within the household. In view of this, one is likely to ask the question, how are contributions measured? There may not be an objective way to measure household contributions, however, from practice and convention, contributions are measured by one's earnings, spending as well as the gap between earnings and spending. For example, Enete and Amusa (2010), writing on women's contribution to farming decisions in cocoa based agro-forestry households in Nigeria concluded that financial constraints is one of the key factors which limited women's contributions to farm decisions.

The bargaining approach actually suggests, however, that traditional social norms and values can be undermined so long as members within the household fulfill their mandate as contributors of resources for consumption. This implies that, if a woman contributes more to the household economy, she is able to assume decision making power without regard to the norms of gendered roles. Silberschmidt (1992) reveals a shift of balance of power from the men to women among the Kisii of Kenya. This largely results from the process of socio-economic change in the last century which made women bread-winners of the household and largely as household heads (these include household in which all the work and economic responsibility falls on women

even when men are present). Silberschmidt's work indicates that men's financial support for the household is infrequent. This is supported by men's claims that they contribute what they can afford. Additionally, women's agricultural production constitutes the main basis of subsistence for the family; hence, earning women the power to influence decisions regarding birth control among others. The above work epitomizes the bargaining model approach which undermines traditional social norms and values governing the Kisii of Kenya, thereby shifting power from men to women.

Also, the balance of power is not only determined by household contributions but to what economists refer to as a "fallback" position which could be utilized as well to shift power with regards to household decisions. For example, Oppong (1981) brings to the fore the importance of the Akan matrifocal locality (matrifocal residential system), a residential system which in itself can be utilized by women as a 'fallback' for bargaining in intra-household decision making. This is because the matrilineage provides some social support that women can rely in times of need. Also, the customary Akan wife has a more secure home and a source of permanent maintenance with her own mother and siblings (Oppong, 1981) – a potential utility she would enjoy should co-operation with her husband collapse (Kabeer, 1997). This is also shown in the work of Hagan (1983) among the Efutu of Winneba who practice dual descent, by which a person inherits from both mother and father. The Efutu marriage is however duolocal, a residential system where married men and women reside in separate dwelling. In the case of divorce which is reported to be highly prevalent, women rely entirely on their mother and sisters with their dwelling space for support for their children. Clark (1994) shows how market women fall on the safety net of their matrilineage in providing care-giving support to their children while they are

engaged in market activities. The fact that a woman has support within her extended family, and resources to draw on in case co-operation with her spouse collapses might give her some psychological strength in engaging the bargaining process more confidently.

It is, however, not always the case that the more income a woman contributes to the household the greater her influence she will have in decision making. Factors such as social, cultural or religious norms may impinge on women's ability to influence decision making (Kabeer, 1994; 1997; Bass & Richards, 2012). Urdinola and Wodon's (2010) publication on "Income Generation and Intra-Household Decision Making in Nigeria" establish that earnings, however visible, do not necessarily improve women's intra-household bargaining power. This is due to the entrenched patriarchal social norms and practices in Nigeria. This suggests that resource contribution appears not to have much significance in the redistribution of power in a socio-cultural context where norms are conservative. In other societies such as those of Bangladesh, existing norms and practices vest power in men through religious practices such as purdah⁴. Under purdah, women's contribution to the household expenditure does not earn them power for negotiating decisions in the household.

This is in agreement with Adomako Ampofo's notion of "gender orientation". Adomako Ampofo (1999) defines gender orientation as prescribed roles, responsibilities, rights and obligations for women and men. Indeed, socialization plays a crucial part in determining a person's gender orientation. She further explains that "when this orientation is egalitarian, the individual has similar expectations for

⁴ Purdah, a Muslim system of sex segregation, practices by keeping women in seclusion

women and men, and grants them equal rights: when the orientation is male-dominant the individual typically has different expectations for women and men, and accords men more rights” (Adomako Ampofo, 1999:97).

A male dominant orientation is likely to override structural factors, including the woman’s contribution to household expenditure, education, occupation and seniority. For instance, Hannah Warren’s work on women’s contribution to household expenditure and their participation in conjugal decision making revealed instances when women contributed to household expenditure and were unable to influence household decisions; while others contributed none and yet were able to influence household decisions. Adomako Ampofo (1999) explains that the outcome of the result is determined by the gender orientation of the husband or wives. Thus, ‘a wife or husband may have an egalitarian or male-dominant gender orientation, irrespective of the level of education, occupational status, or financial contribution she or he makes, and I expect that it is this gender orientation which is ultimately influential in determining the balance of power between spouses’(Adomako Ampofo;1999:98).

1.2.3 Social Dominance Theory and Household Decision Making

The social dominance theory is another theory that highlights the various discrepancies regarding intra-household decision making. The social dominance theory also explains the origin and consequence of social hierarchies and the oppression of minority groups in society (Pratto & Walker, 2004). This theory has been utilized by social scientists to explain intra-household decision making processes. The theory posits an existence of social hierarchies on social categories ranging from dominant to subordinate, who have disadvantaged status and lack power

in their group. According to the theory, social institutions such as marriage, religious and, educational institutions associate power to the dominant group, usually men, to the detriment of women. The theory suggests that the ideologies of these institutions maintain and amplify these existing hierarchies. Within the social dominance school of thought, Pratto and Walker (2004) outline the four bases of gendered power in explaining household power positioning. These are Consensual Ideologies, Social Obligations, Resource Control, and Force.

The first base of power, the Consensual Ideologies, is associated with is “gender roles, norms, stereotypes, and any other beliefs or expectations about men and women that are generally agreed upon in a society or culture that put women in weaker positions in comparison to men” (Rosenthal and Levy, 2010:67). Thus, the traditional patriarchal societies accord men greater responsibilities for decision making and greater financial responsibilities. Social obligations, the second power base of the social dominance theory refer to the responsibilities individuals have towards others, a communal value cherished in most African societies (Igboin, 2011). Thus, the social obligations that people have towards others are bound to determine their power within the household and limit their ability to influence change. Thirdly, force as a power base involves any threat of violence that undermines a women’s power. The fourth power base, resource control, suggests that unequal access to employment result in women becoming vulnerable and dependent on their partners (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). The social dominance theory will be discussed from these perspectives.

From a Consensual Ideological perspective, the gendered roles of men is not limited to being solely financial providers but also extends to the control and management of

the financial resource. This is a factor that puts women at a disadvantaged position in comparison with men. The concept of male management of household resources, including income is one practice that dis-empowers women. This practice ensures that women's earnings are controlled, managed and redistributed by the household head. Indeed this practice is seen to be remodeled by Akans outside their traditional jurisdiction (Manuh, 1999, 2001). Manuh established the rise of conflict within the household. This is most probably because in most West African societies, men and women control their own finances (Oppong, 1981; Elson, 1997). While the traditional concept of male control of women's resources may not apply to the Akan culture, this holds some truth in Bangladesh, where the norm encourages male control of women's resources. Kabeer (1999) provides evidence of how access to intra-household resources (by men) limits women's decision making powers. Women hand out their incomes to their husbands as custom demands; and they have little or no say on what their income should be used for.

Consequently, in many African societies and elsewhere, women are tasked and burdened with the responsibility of household chores for a better part of their lives which affect their educational and professional pursuits as well as their development. These tasks are social obligations that are ascribed to women by virtue of their gender. Matangi and Kashora (2012) established that spousal roles such as raising family, as well as work-related demands retarded women's pursuit of higher education. These obligations place women in weaker positions over their spouses, limiting their access to knowledge and better earning opportunities that could be derived from formal education (Oppong, 1974; Tsikata, 2009; Suda, 2002). Additionally, the social obligation required of women to be altruistic impedes

women's educational, savings and investment growth. Women tend to deplete their resources to meet their social obligations as mothers (Emecheta, 1979; Malhotra and Mather, 1997; Becker, 1991). All these limit women's access to fallback resource to be utilized to influence decisions and change within the household.

2.2 Women's Education and Decision Making in the Household

There is a wide body of literature indicating the relevance of education to women's development and education as an empowerment tool for women (Varghese, 2011; Manuh, 2002; FAWE, 2004; Adomako Ampofo, 2002; Adomako Ampofo & Kropp Dakubu, 2009). Education is widely known to improve the quality of life of people. It enable women have influence over family sizes, which promote healthier families. Women also, are able to make informed choices as a result of access to education (Offorma, 2009; Kabeer, 1996; Arthur, 2005; Ghana Statistical Service, 2000). How does women's bargaining power increase with increasing levels of education? Hypothetically, the more education a woman has should improve her bargaining power in two ways: first, through the knowledge empowerment effect; and second, through the income earning power which education enables (Malhotra et al, 2003).

The knowledge empowerment effect of education for bargaining purposes is of importance to this study. As is popularly said in Ghanaian parlance "Knowledge is power". Education makes a woman aware and informed of her rights and gives her the confidence to demand them in a bargaining process. But this goes beyond the woman feeling empowered by her knowledge to bargain. The male spouse could also be expected to be more respectful of her opinion if she is well educated. In this case, a spouse, being aware of his wife's education, would consult with her on household

decisions. Hence a wife with a doctorate should have a greater influence in decision making than her counterpart with a primary or secondary education. Ezeh's (1993:166) work on Ghana, however, suggests otherwise. He notes that "women's education does not seem to improve the ability to predict her husband's contraceptive attitude. While, being married to an educated husband increases a woman's approval of family planning regardless of her own level of education." This finding questions the validity of the bargaining theory in the sense that women's access to education does not succeed in providing the leverage that is required to effect contraceptive choice of the husband. There exists the interplay of stronger factors such as culture which impedes the process of women's empowerment via education.

Subsequently, the direct channels of employment and earning as a result of education seem to be the more effective in empowering women. However, empirical work by Jayaweera (1997) and others has revealed a weak link between education and employment in developing countries due to the high unemployment rates. Women with tertiary level education are unable to take up jobs within the market economy. This is as a result of the high unemployment rate in developing economies. Would this mean the theoretical link between education and a woman's bargaining power is irrelevant? It should be relevant, at least, hypothetically. This is not an attempt to establish the invalidity of the theory. In order to achieve the theory's predicted outcome, there is the need for the availability of jobs. Thus, when graduates walk into jobs after completion of their education then, the theory would be proven valid.

From the gender orientation perspective, patriarchal African societies (which have an orientation of male dominance) promote boys education over girls' due to the social

responsibility imposed on men to promote the continuity of the family lineage (Glick & Sahn, 2000). In view of this, girls are denied education on the basis that parents are unlikely to benefit from their investments – the reason being that girls get married off into other families, taking away with them that investment into their matrimonial home. In a matrilineal system, however, this would be advantageous to the matrilineage, but, the cost of girls' education is presumed higher than boys, because boys are able to contribute to their own education through market earnings. Additionally, girls are needed to assist with domestic work – a benefit the household would lose if girls leave the house for school. According to the Forum for African Women Educationalist (FAWE, 2004), girls are forced or either abducted for marriage in Ethiopia, a consensual cultural phenomenon that prevents girls from accessing education. Also, in West Africa, girls are given out as domestic workers to earn wages for their household. These cultural orientations form the basis of perception which are reinforced through the process of socialization. These actions put girls at a disadvantaged position when they are young and in a much less influential position when they eventually become spouses. These women eventually repeat the cycle of socialization based on their limited knowledge and perception of their world. Increased access to education for girls is fundamental to improving their living standard in the long-run (Progres, 1997), and thus their ability to influence household decision.

2.3 Women's Occupation and Decision Making in the Household

Most of the issues pertaining to occupation have already been raised in resource contribution; since one of the main objectives of occupation is remuneration which is perceived as empowering with regards to influencing household decisions. From a

social dominance perspective, there appears to be a universal cultural phenomenon that undermines remunerations for care-giving professions. There are instances where remuneration for men is higher than women even when they take on the same professions (Bujra, 1992). These are practices that put women at disadvantaged positions relative to men.

Writing on Eritrea, Arshad & Malik (2012) revealed that caring labor of child care, nursing and elementary school teaching still remain the preserve of women, although men have integrated nominally. Conversely, men are involved in the most prestigious occupations such as management, transportation and construction which attract higher remuneration than the occupation that women are involved in. Explanations for this trend can be attributed to the socially accepted gender division of labor, where lines of occupation are greatly influenced by a person's biological make-up (Sikod, 2007). Parashar (2008), also writing on South Africa, noted that occupational sex segregation is the most important factor that determines female/male wage differentials, with low wages associated with "female" occupations as compared to "male" occupations. This however, is a practice in the market economy that leaves women with less resources and unable to influence as many household decisions.

2.4 Female Seniority and Decision Making in the Household

The notion of seniority as a basis for power distribution is deeply entrenched in traditional social norms and values in most African societies. Various researchers have also sought to explore the effects of seniority in power distribution at the household level (Adomako Ampofo, 1999; Mabsout, Ramzi & Staveren, 2010; Barbier et al., 2005; Angel-Urdinola and Wodon, 2010). The significance of age

cannot be overemphasized since age can be understood in terms of the “biological exigencies of socialization and the necessity for the transmission of social behavior and values from generation to generation” (Eisenst Adt, 1954).

In traditional society, seniority is associated with respect and authority. The degree of authority among members within a group is characterized by age difference (Eisenst Adt, 1954). Oyewumi (1997) adds that the organizing principle within the family among the Yorubas is seniority based on relative age. Also, among the Akans, for example, women are deemed to assume male status when they grow older. These women are deemed fit to give wise counsel to the community members (Miescher, 2007). These cultural phenomena throw light on the relative importance of seniority in African societies. They also lend support to the notion that seniority is a determinant in decision making power. The household decision-maker, by virtue of age is ascribed privileges such as authority and respect. The household structure on the basis of age stages a platform for unequal power relation in respect of the prevailing social norms. Women therefore, become powerless by virtue of being typically younger than their spouses.

Indeed, the wider the age-gap between husbands and wives, the greater the power of the husbands. In most African societies, husbands are generally older than their wives and as a result are more likely to influence decisions by virtue of seniority (Adomako Ampofo, 1999; Gyekye, 1996; Igboin, 2011). But is it likely that men will respect and relinquish power to wives who are older or even of the same age? This may not be so; given the cultural norm that surrounds the institution of marriage, that demands submission from women. In view of this, husbands are tasked with the responsibility of taking decisions on household matters with little or no contributions from their

wives. This, however, is a cultural phenomenon that puts women at a disadvantaged position.

These authorities and power associated with men either by virtue of seniority or some other factors are re-constructed in terms that reflect male right and entitlement over their partners (Adomako Ampofo and Prah, 2009). To a large extent, males are socialized to expect to exercise control over females (Inhorn, 2002; Adomako Ampofo and Boateng 2007; Adomako Ampofo, 2001; Wood and Jewkes, 2001). Force is however, essential to enforce control. Force as defined by the social dominance theory is any threat of violence that undermines women's power. Force as a power base amply provides explanation for the outcome of decisions like reproductive decisions. It has been proven that force is utilized by men to suppress women power in reproductive decisions. In a study on Zimbabwe, Njovana and Watts (1996) reported that threats of violence were used by men to control women's sexual and reproductive behavior. Their work also found that there was low contraceptive use among wives. The result further indicated that wives could not open up discussions on contraceptive use for fear of being subjected to violence. Also regarding contraception use, Bawah et al (1999), cited violence as a form of retaliation for using or attempting to discuss the use of contraception. The evidence above suggests that violence or the threat of violence is associated with lower contraception use and a diminished ability of women to negotiate protection against diseases. The act of violence against women has psychological impact which may lead to poor health and traumas. This however, serves as a limitation for fair bargaining within an atmosphere of fear. Women also loose self confidence as a

result. The use of force by men limits women's decision making abilities no matter her level of contribution.

2.5 Conclusion

The above theories and concepts have all attempted to throw light on why one party within the household wields more power than the other. Most of the theories and concepts such as bargaining, exploitative, neo-classical, social dominance and to some degree gender orientation all place emphases on the control of resource as basis for influencing household decisions. While control of resources is important, it is not enough to ensure women's inclusion in household decision making.

Structure is at the heart of bargaining theory, exploitative theory and neo-classical theory as they emphasize the importance of structural factors as levers for power. From a gender orientation perspective, where structure forms a crucial part in establishing a person's gender orientation, structural impact is likely to produce an individual with an egalitarian outlook in decision making in the household. However, a male dominant orientation may tend to undermine any structural equality a woman would have with a man. Social dominance theory only points to the role of culture in assigning roles to both genders. Although, some culturally assigned roles are beneficial to certain groups of women, largely these roles place women at disadvantaged positions and their structural variables are mostly likely to be advantageous to women. The concept of the hearth-hold however, provide evidence for African women's involvement in household decision making while refuting the unitary household model typically used to describe African household.

CHAPTER THREE

Household Decision-Making: Evidence from Empirical Literature

3.0 Introduction

Numerous empirical studies have drawn links between women's participation in decision making and their status, levels of power, and/or 'empowerment' (Adomako Ampofo, 1999; Clark, 1994; GDHS 2008a, 2008b, 2008c; Gadzekpo, 1999; Ghana SSS, 2004; Kishor, 2005; Oppong, 1974; Warren 2009; Tamale, 2004). This chapter examines studies on intra-household decision-making to unravel the effects that income contribution, education, occupation and seniority have on the level of power held by spouses in household decisions such as household purchases and reproductive decisions making.

3.1 Structure versus culture

The notion behind resource acquisition is centered on social structures, notably capitalism and patriarchy which are perceived to be the sources of women's oppression. This notion emphasizes that the relative strength of the traditional social structure limits women's access to power. Women in the process become passive within the existing traditional social structure due to the dominant positions accorded men. Social power theorists (Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Bernard, 1972; Komarovsky, 1964; Rodman, 1972) have suggested that resources form the basis of power within marriage. They claim that power is equitably distributed between the spouses if they both enter the marriage with relative equal resources (Clark, 1994; Manuh, 1999, 2005; Mookodi, 2004; Darkwa, 2007; Amanor-Wilks, 2009). As discussed in the earlier chapter, women's access to resources of income, occupational prestige, and educational attainment is suggested by the structural feminist as a solution to the

adverse impact of capitalism and patriarchy on women. Thus, enabling opportunities to improve women's access to resources outside the family could result in a relative balanced distribution of power within the household. To support this claim, Sackey (2005), writing on the impact of education and women's participation in the labor market established that female education did matter among both rural and urban middle aged women. Education had a positive impact on women's participation in the labor market, resulting in an increase in their resource base – while reducing fertility rate as well.

Safilios-Rothschild (1967), taking a macrosystemic view of power in the household suggests that culture is the determining factor for power between spouses. He indicates that male dominance of power from a wider society, dictated by culture, is transposed into the family structure by means such as gendered ideologies and gender-segregated resources (Qualls, 1987; Scanzoni, 1982; Hansen, 1992; Dair Gillespie, 1971; Cooney et al, 1982; Straus & Yodanis, 1996; Bawa, 2012; Familusi, 2012). Men become beneficiaries of this power, while women become subordinates to them. Resource theorists, on the other hand, have also established that women's position improves by virtue of their access to education and wage employment (England and Kilbourne, 1990; Scanzoni 1992). This however, is deemed to provide lasting solution to the adverse impact of culture on women's decision making in the household. In view of this, and with the help of existing literature, this chapter will seek to explore if resource contribution, education, occupation and seniority will improve women's decision making in the household as predicted. The empirical works below have sought to capture the dynamics of “structure versus culture” and how these dynamics improve or weaken power position at the household level.

3.2 Income contributions and Household Decision Making

A large number of empirical studies have suggested that women's resource contributions play an important role in improving power positioning for intra-household decision making. (Awumbila, 2001; Agyeman & Casterline, 2002; Tamale, 2004; Clark, 1994; Bashow, 2004; Amanor-Wilks, 2009; Apusigah, 2009). Although, there is evidence of socio-cultural constraints, women are still making strides in improving their access to resources (Benneh, 1994; Shettima, 1998; Imam et al 1992). This section examines various nuances and contrasts in the empirical literature over household decision making with regards to resource contribution.

Reviewing empirical works on women's resource contributions and its relative effect on women's participation in household decisions, two (2) broad findings emerged as follows; Firstly, women's contributions to the household expenditure increased their relative influence in household decisions. This view is supported by Warren (2010), GSS (2000), Adomako Ampofo, (1999), Oppong (1975) among others. These works validate theories with structuralist perspectives⁵. Thus, this school of thought propagates that resource contribution plays vital role in power distribution in the household. The second emerging conclusion throws light on an opposing perspective to the structuralist and ascribe to the notion that culture is the determinant of power distribution in the household (Oppong 1974; Angel-Urdinola and Wodon 2010).

Another theme emerging throughout the literature is that the effect of resource contribution must be measured against enduring traditions and norms. Adomako Ampofo (1999), Nwanesi (2006), Angel-Urdinola and Wodon (2010), Oluwatayo

⁵ Structuralist Perspective – A school of thought that looks at how the distribution of resources, especially how women's access to education and employment affect their status; in this case, decision making.

(2009) among others support this theme. For instance, writing on resource contribution, gender orientation, and childbearing decision-making in Ghana, Adomako Ampofo (1999) revealed that household decisions, to a large extent were along the lines of socially ascribed roles. Thus, the findings indicated that though husbands and wives are able to influence decisions as per their relative contributions to the household economy, the decisions they influenced were along the lines of what was socially ascribed to male and female.

Additionally, Angel-Urdinola and Wodon (2010) in their survey conducted on income generation and intra-household decision making in Nigeria suggested that men tended to have most of the decision making power regarding the use of productive assets such as land, shelter and crop sales. Women, on the other hand, participated more often in decisions on expenditures for food, health, and education. Also, examining the impact of micro-credit schemes on rural women's economic empowerment in southern Nigeria, Oluwatayo (2009) found that in spite of women's engagement in economic activities such as trading, they still were powerless in influencing decisions at the household level. While it may be argued that increased economic activities may translate into increased financial responsibilities in the household, this correlation, however, does not translate into an increased gain in household decision making. Major decision making at the household level still remained the prerogative of the male spouse. Women influence decisions on food and children's welfare, thus, those socially ascribed roles labeled as "women's matters" (Nwanesi, 2006). Also, writing on the matrilineal Zomba and patrilineal Mzimba of Malawi, Kathewera-Banda et al. (2011) revealed that in both matrilineal and patrilineal societies, access, control and ownership of land does not necessarily lead to more bargaining power for women

within the household. It is clear that bargaining power is determined by many other factors.

These studies question the notion that earning an independent income or control of resources such as land, leads to an increase in women's household decision-making (Kabeer, 1999; Adomako Ampofo, 1999; Tamale, 2004). The relative influence of culture is evidenced as strong, even in the light of women's engagement in economic activities. Perhaps, the governing gender orientation in these societies dictates women's engagement in economic activities while limiting women's participation in major decisions. This could suggest that women acknowledge their increased power base due to their contribution to household expenditure. However, they choose not to exercise those powers because they may seek to uphold the traditional norms on women's role in the household. According to Steady (2001: 11);

Women represent the ultimate value in African life, from the more conventional role of women within the public arena of an Africa community and the religious life of her people to the undocumented village women storytellers who educate and initiate future generations into their culture (p.11).

Indeed, there is the tendency for women to hold onto what is considered custom, even when these customs have negative impact on them. It is however, not enough to assume that women will exercise power if they have it. This is because they may want to fit into the cultural stereotype by which they were socialized.

Other studies such as the Ghana Demographic Health Survey (2003) and Warren (2009) have reported a positive relationship between women's contributions and household decisions. Indeed findings from the GDHS (2003) reported that 58.7% of women employed for cash influenced decisions on daily household purchases,

compared to 17.1% of women who were not employed. Sixty seven percent of women employed for cash also influenced decisions on major household purchases, as opposed to 19.15% of women who were unemployed. The GDHS (2008) also reported a similar trend of a positive correlation between women's household income contributions and their decision making in major family purchases, reproductive decision making and purchase of household needs. These works indicate that women who earned cash had more say in daily household purchases and major household purchases than women who were unable to contribute to the household expenditure. Also, writing on women's contribution to household expenditures and their participation in conjugal decision making in Ghana, Warren (2009) established that the higher the proportion of household expenditures contributed by respondents, the greater their influence in the following household decisions: making large household purchases, making household purchases for daily needs, and visits to family or relatives. While Warren's work may also support the structural argument, there were exceptions in the outcome of her study which suggests the influence of other factors, including culture. Thus, the results revealed instances where respondents who contributed insignificantly to household expenditures participated in all or some of the three decisions. Conversely, there were respondents who contributed to the household expenditures and yet, participated in none or only some of the above listed decisions. Here, we see some interplay of both structural forces and culture; the former acting as an enabling factor to women's relative influence on household decisions, while the latter acted as a restraining factor inhibiting the process of structural change.

Additionally, Castilla (2011) confirmed the existence of "income hiding" in Ghanaian rural households. Her work revealed that some couples withhold information on earnings. Husbands are said to hide income by purchasing gift items for other family

members other than wives and children. Women, on the other hand, increase spending on personal items. This leads to a decrease in non-essential items such as prepared foods, oil and protein, which can be substituted with less expensive alternatives. This work remotely adds to a small and recent literature that suggests the abuse of power.

Furthermore, Lancaster, Maitra and Ray (2006) indicated that in India, where women gained sole control over household decision-making, preference for luxurious items increased over necessities. Also, Gitter and Barham (2008: 287) found that “for households with extremely powerful women, more female power may begin to reduce schooling or at least have no additional marginal impact.” It is important to note that these new trends of research findings similar to other findings on male consumption patterns. These indicate that men usually spend their extra income on goods such as alcohol, cigarettes, high-status consumer goods and even “female companionship” (Becker, 1981). On the other hand studies have shown that women use extra incomes to support children and households. Thus, the claim that women increase purchases in luxurious item could only be a form of savings which is mostly to be reinvested in the household in difficult times. For instance, Kabeer (1997), observed that since women cannot easily save money and buy property of their own, they save their wealth by purchasing luxurious items such as gold jewelries and cloth, which are used up or resold during difficult times or inherited by their daughters when they die.

Indeed, resource contribution has been proven to play an important role in the positioning of power in the household. In examining gender division of labour and women’s decision making power in rural households, Ngome (2003), established that

77 per cent of the men and 73 per cent of the women said that the lack of income affects the man's decision-making power in households. On the other hand, 98 per cent of the women and 83 per cent of men believed that once a woman was in a position to meet the needs of the household, she obtains more respect from her husband. But does this "respect" translate into influencing household decisions? It may or may not. A husband's gender ideology is critical in determining whether women influence decision or not.

3.3 Impact of Structural Adjustment Policies on Household Decision Making

Writing on the adverse impact of economic policies on household decision making Oluwatayo (2009), Oyediran (2004) and Barwa (1995) argued that Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) appeared to have distorted the norms within a household and contributed to the erosion of women's power to men. The SAP did have an adverse impact on most households within sub-Saharan African region, creating poverty in most households. In poverty-stricken households, Oluwatayo (2009) revealed that out of ten (10) decisions on food security, only three (3) were taken by women. These concern the type of food to buy, when to take the food and food insecurity coping strategies to adopt. On the other hand, decisions such as property acquisition, house rent and school fees were the sole preserve of men in rural Ekiti State of Nigeria. Oyediran, (2004), also writing on Nigerian households, found that poverty rose from 28.1 percent in 1980 to 46.3 percent and 65.5 percent in 1985 and 1996 respectively. Oyediran, (2004) found that pre-SAP, women influenced household decisions including number of children to have, children's discipline, children's education, employment and other decisions. However, during the post SAP era, there was a reduction of women's participation in the above mentioned household

decisions. Oyediran's (2004) work corroborates Angel-Urdinola and Wodon (2010) in suggesting that poorer women have less decision-making power. These evidences clearly indicate a relatively low decision-making power among women of poorer households and further suggest the disadvantaged positions of women due to culturally constructed norms that limit their access to resources, resulting in little or no influence in household decisions.

3.4 Education and Household Decision-Making

As indicated in the first and second chapters, education enhances women's decision-making power by endowing them with knowledge and information on their rights, and by improving their employment and income earning capacities. Education is noted to be a key instrument in advancing women's empowerment. "Education is increasingly becoming a major factor enabling women to break down barriers to some socialization factors, giving rise to the division of household labor. The more educated a woman is, the more likely it is that she is going to venture into spheres traditionally considered male areas" (Sikod, 2007: 61). Education therefore, can relatively even-out the playing field for both genders hence, balancing the playing field for effectively influencing household decision making.

Recent studies have suggested that formal education is a pre-requisite for greater social autonomy for women and for improving the socio-economic status of their families (GSS, 2000). However, there exists unequal access to education for females, especially those from poorer households. Taking into consideration the relative challenges females generally encounter in accessing education in spite of its importance, one could pose the following questions: does education really increase

access to resource and if so, how does that translate into women's power acquisition to advance decisions in favor of them?

A number of works have established a positive relationship between women's education and their ability to influence intra-household decisions. A survey conducted by Lancaster, Matra and Ray (2006), suggested that when an uneducated wife acquires formal education, it increases the husband's wage-earning power; as women tend to utilize the knowledge acquired in support of their spouses ventures. This suggests that the economic benefits of female literacy are not limited to only women. Advancing their argument they showed that the closer a wife's educational experience is to her spouse, the more likely it is for a relatively equal power sharing among the spouses. Thus education plays a vital role in the distribution of power in the household. Acharya (2008) concluded that Nepalese women's increased education was positively correlated to their autonomy in their health care decisions. Research in Ghana further corroborates this fact by showing that households in which the wife's education was closely approximate to the husband's education reported joint decision-making on children's education and welfare (Oppong, 1970; Antwi-Nsiah, 1993).

Adomako Ampofo (1999), in determining the impact of education on reproductive decisions indicated that the less educated a wife was, the higher the likelihood for her husband to achieve his reproductive preference on the number of children they would have. This suggests that education is important for women's autonomy in fertility preference. Women's autonomy in determining lower fertility preference is not just limited to women's good health and raising healthier families. In the light of rapid population growth associated with developing countries and scarcity of resources,

women's autonomy on household reproductive decisions has a much bigger relevance in regulating rates of population growth.

Alternatively, other studies including that of Ezeh, (1993) and Doodo (1993) have shown that women's education have less influence on women's reproductive decisions. The impact of education here is intercepted by culture. In some traditions, reproductive decisions are the prerogative of men. Investigation on how the selection process of couples affects reproductive decision making, Ezeh (1993) indicates that a woman's contraceptive attitude depends not only on her personal characteristics, (for instance, her education) but also those of the husband. However, a woman married to an educated husband is more likely to use contraceptive regardless of her own level of education. Providing an explanation for this outcome, Ezeh argues that men's influence over their wives contraceptive attitudes seems to operate through their comparative advantage in male selection and through cultural norms that subjugate women to men. The arguments raised by these researches suggest that the fact that people are educated does not necessarily mean they will be more susceptible to influencing decisions in the household.

Writing on the importance of women's education in Kenya, Mareng (2010) indicated that women without education have low self-esteem and rely heavily on their spouses to make decisions on their behalf, which makes the men take decisions that usually favour them and not their wives. She adds that if uneducated women are able to influence decisions at all, their choices are usually bound by their orientation which is usually informed by dominant social values. However, educated women have access to varied information which opens them to various choices on reproductive decisions.

Some studies have established a link between education and women's employment (Baah-Boateng, 2004; Ufomata, 2000; Amu, 2005; Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare, 1999; Boateng and Sarpong, 2001). While this is true, women have limited access to employment opportunities due to factors including occupational segregation which restrict women's access to most high paying jobs, the burden of household responsibilities, and the lack of employment opportunities among other factors. According to Baah-Boateng (2004), the Ghanaian labour market is characterized by increasing incidence of underemployment particularly among university and polytechnic graduates. In the light of this, there are more men employed in the formal sector than women, and many women remain unemployed or settle for low paying jobs in the informal sector. Clark (1994) argues that limiting women's resource gain to only education is problematic since there are wealthy but uneducated women in the informal sector whose access to resources is through no means of education. While this is true, the argument for resources provides a basis for understanding their relative influence position in the household.

Some variations among traditional ethnic groupings may either promote or limit women's access to education. For instance, The study of Kritz and Makinwa-Adebusoye (1999) on women's autonomy among five ethnic groups in Nigeria found that employment opportunities and family structures were significant in defining relationship between education and women's decision making abilities at the household level. Kritz and Makinwa-Adebusoye (1999) established a positive relationship between education (primary and secondary) and women's decision making. However, when their analysis was differentiated by ethnic groups, education had no effect on the wife's decision making among the Ijaw and Igbo ethnic groups.

Among the Kanuri ethnic group, however, both primary and secondary education had an impact on women's decision making, while secondary education only was positively related to women's household decision making among the Yoruba and the Hausa ethnic groups. Kritiz and Makinwa-Adebusoye (1999) conclude that the system of gender stratification within the ethnic group and the opportunities made available to women for education and employment determined whether women influenced decision or not women.

On the contrary, the 2008 GDHS reported that 41% and 53% of women without education were able to influence decisions on daily household purchases and major household purchase respectively (GSS, 2000). 39% percent and 43.4% of women with education were able to influence decision on daily household purchases and major household purchases. This suggested no significant difference in decision-making by women's education. Hindin (2000) finds no relationship between women's schooling and their decision-making input using Demographic Health and Survey data collected in Zimbabwe but does not discuss why this may be the case.

Discussions from this section have shown the important role that education plays in influencing power sharing in the household. Most of the evidence showed that access to education or higher education is consistently associated with women's participation in household decision making. Although, other works have suggested otherwise, thereby indicating a partial effect of education to women's participation household decision making.

3.5 Occupation and Household Decision-Making

The literature on occupation will focus on the factors that either promote or impede women's access to resources and how having an occupation may improve women's power in the household. Gender division of labor, is a factor that impedes on women's access to resources (Sikod, 2007). It is portrayed in the form of biases such as sex division of labour, unequal pay for equal work, and other forms of gender inequality on the labour market. These biases account for low income acquisition and resources.

Opong et al (1975) addressed issues of gender bias as basis for limiting women's progress in their chosen occupations. Their work revealed that migrant female farmers who followed their husbands to new cocoa farming areas were unable to fully develop their farms. This was because these women had to divide their time and energy in food production, reproduction activities as well as assisting on their husbands farms. Andah (1978), Bujra (1992) and England (2003) all reveal discrimination against female employees in the disbursement of wages and fringe benefits. Also adding to the argument, Sikod (2007) identifies the inequalities between men and women as a factor that hampers women's access to power in the household.

Contrary to the above works, a number of works have associated greater degree of autonomy to self-employed women (Aidoo, 1985; GDHS 2003, 2008; Oyitso & Olomukoro, 2012; Okojie et al, 2009; Chant and Pedwell, 2008). Analysing the relationship between occupation and husband's fertility preference, Adomako Ampofo (1999), found that households where husbands achieved their fertility preference (and wife did not), were those in which husbands and wives held the same

position as junior staff. Subsequently, her work indicated that self-employed women were unable to determine their fertility preference. Adomako Ampofo (1999) argued that although self-employed, women's remuneration were low because they were engaged in petty trading. Women, however, were limited in resources due to low remuneration and were therefore unable to leverage power. Additionally, in household where wives held senior career positions, husbands did not achieve their fertility preference in instances where it conflicts with that of their wives. Here, a wife's power position is enhanced by virtue of her occupation. Clark (1994) also reported that Akan women's engagement in trading tended to have considerable and valuable influence on a number of major household decisions among which includes decisions on children's education, fertility preference, family relocation and decisions on food for the household. While African women may relatively be in a good position compared to women from other countries regarding rights to work outside the home and own resources, practically, women do encounter real challenges at the job that hinder their access to resources which affect their power position in the household.

3.6 Seniority and Household Decision-Making

The relatively high age gap between spouses is an important feature associated with traditional African marriage system. Most African traditions demand that women marry early, while men marry because they need to acquire many resources to prove their responsibility (Akyeampong, 1997). A certain degree of wealth is required to facilitate marriage and enhance a man's status in society (Akyeampong, 1997; Achebe, 1958; Gyekye, 1996). This implies that older men are relatively wealthier than younger men. Barbier et al. (2005) suggest that Sub-Sahara Africa holds the world record for age difference between spouses whereby husbands are more advance

in age than their wives. The relative age gap is an indicator of inequality between the sexes and is suggestive of a means of controlling the younger spouse. How has empirical literature on husband's seniority affected power between spouses?

Writing on age between spouses and contraceptive practice in African, Barbier et al. (2005), showed that the lower the age differences between spouses, the higher the probability of using modern contraception. Large age differences between spouses, on the other hand, hindered the use of contraception. This is to achieve preference through the power they acquire by virtue of their age. Also investigating the impact of age and reproductive decision-making, Adomako Ampofo (1999) concludes that the age gap between spouses may determine household decisions on fertility preference. She notes that "given the social norm in which men marry younger women, those households that defy these norms are likely to uphold egalitarian gender orientation." Additionally, Oppong (1970) established that household decisions were likely to be syncratic in cases where husband and wife were in the same or adjacent age groups. This is surprising, taking into consideration the period of this research; one is likely to consider age as crucial in determining household decisions, as the period of this research suggests the greater pervasiveness of cultural influence. Perhaps, the outcome of her work is also influenced by the middle-class background of her respondents.

Explaining the effect of poverty on women's household decision-making, Oyediran (2004) found that before the implementation of the Structural Adjustment policies in Nigeria, age played a crucial factor in women's participation across the reproductive, cultural and economic decision-making. However the impact of age as a decision-

making determinant “whittled out” during the post-SAP era. While the dominant literature associate power to large age gaps between spouses, the interplay of other structural factors are responsible for power distribution in the household. However, a smaller age gap is likely to promote a relatively equal power sharing in the household.

3.7 Conclusion

Reviewing empirical works on the impact of resource contribution, education, occupation and seniority on women’s ability to influence decisions, two major conclusions emerged; firstly, those empirical works that supported the structuralist argument (on the relation between resources and power acquisition), and secondly, those that supported the cultural argument (as determining who wields power). These works also revealed that both structural and cultural influences are pervasive in nature. Thus, where there exist a limitation in the manifestation of one, it is as a result of the interference of the other. However, the cultural component has restriction on how much leverage women may have within the household. This is because African culture is largely patriarchal. The structural component however, has proven effective in improving leverage for women to influence household decisions except under circumstance where they may choose not to exercise their power – which may however, still be due to cultural factors.

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussions

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss both theories and empirical data in an attempt to establish which of the understudied variables (resource contributions, education, occupation or seniority) have the most influence on decision making dynamics in the household. I also examine the relative strength of culture in determining the power structure of the household; and examine the strength of the theoretical explanation on women's household decision making in the African context.

This chapter is divided into two sections: the first discusses the theories in an attempt to identify which theories provide compelling explanation[s] of decision making in African households, while the second discusses the role of context in decision making outcomes.

4.1 The Role of Structural Factors and Cultural Factors in Women's Decision Making in the Household.

The theories under examination are categorized as exploitative, neo-classical and bargaining theories. All these could be placed under 'the structuralist perspective' because they suggest that resources are essential to improving women's involvement in decision making. The social theory and social dominance theory will be placed under the 'cultural ideological perspective' because they ascribe to the view that the effect of variables such as education, occupation, resource contribution and seniority is muted by the inclusion of culture.

4.1.1 Structural Factors and Decision Making

From the literature discussed in the previous chapters, it is clear that the structuralist perspective requires favorable social and economic conditions in order for the structural variables to have positive effects on women's household decision making. For instance, the presence of occupational segregation, and the weak link between education and employment in Africa are most likely to render the structuralist perspective of little practical effect in Africa, although, hypothetically relevant (Baah-Boateng, 2004; Ufomata, 2000; Amu, 2005; Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare, 1999; Boateng and Sarpong, 2001). There are two main reasons why this argument is valid. Firstly, this is because in a society where women are educated but there is a lack of job opportunities, women cannot improve their income earning capacity even when they are educated. Secondly, where there is occupational segregation, occupation will have little effect on improving women's decision making power because of occupational inequalities which discriminates against women. Thus, in such a situation, both occupation and education, two crucial components of the structuralist perspectives, practically become ineffective.

Social and economic conditions in the form of favorable employment opportunities, especially for women, and non-discriminatory pay for both sexes must be present in order for the predictions of the structuralist perspective to be valid. One could expect that if social and economic conditions are improved, and women gained more employment as well as income earning opportunities, women's decision making power would increase as well, all things being equal.

Although policies targeted at structural change are important in bridging the gap between men and women, they could as well deepen the power imbalance in the household. Unfavorable public policies in the form of social policies, economic policies and legal policies also play a contributory role in widening the gap between genders. The effects of public policies affect the household. Policies that factor in women's interests and concerns provide a suitable context in which women's decision making would improve. For instance, a microfinance program targeting women will have strong potential to empower women who have very little command over household and societal resources. Alternatively, a public policy that lacks inclusion of women's interests can put women in a disadvantage position even in a culturally liberal society. For instance, Oyediran (2004) revealed that the adverse effect of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) increased poverty levels in Nigerian, households from 28.1 percent in 1980 to 46.3 percent and 65.5 percent in 1985 and 1996 respectively. The adverse effect of the policy resulted in the reduction of women's influence over household decision.

While the structural perspective may seem weak from the discussions so far, it is crucial to note that if men and women were to experience identical structural conditions and role expectations, empirically observable differences would disappear. For instance, education has already been shown to have both knowledge-effect and income earning effect. Education is the variable that is most likely to strengthen the structural effect on women's decision making. Thus, when people are socialized to eschew negative cultural practices against women, and value women's roles in society as highly developmental, an egalitarian gender orientation is most likely to be created. In the process, women themselves will develop a better opinion of themselves and

men will equally develop a better opinion of women. In other words, male characteristics resulting from the impact of education is more likely to promote women's involvement in household decision making. Alternatively, an egalitarian gender orientation for women will improve their own perception of themselves.

In effect, the role of education seems more important than resource contribution, occupation and seniority. This is because first, education can be a determinant of occupation and resource contribution, and knowledge acquired from education could provide empowerment. Secondly, the inequality in African gender relations presents a minimal effect of the structural variables. Therefore, until a more equitable gender relation is established, resource contribution, occupation and seniority will attain minimal effect in bridging the gap between men and women's contribution to household decision making.

4.1.2. Discussions on seniority and decision making

Taking into consideration the effect of female seniority on decision making, from a bargaining perspective, one would assume that female seniority would improve a woman's decision making potential at the household level. Empirically this is not the case. The effects of traditional gender relations, overrides the effects of seniority creating a conflict between female seniority and patriarchy (Frimpong-Manso, 2007; Kwansah-Aidoo & Owusu, 2012).

The choice of education is based on theoretical evidence. The multi-dimensional effect of education is varied, it includes, income and resource production through employment gained, and the re-orientation of gender ideologies to both educated

women and men. In view of the above, access to education improves women's power to be used as leverage to influence decisions. Therefore, the more education a woman has (be it formal or informal) the more likely she will influence decisions in the household. The positive effect of education is not limited to women but applies to men as well, thereby resulting in the creation of an enabling environment for empowering women.

4.1.3 Cultural Factors and Decision Making

Alternatively, it could be argued that the unfavorable social and economic conditions women are experience as a result of the male domineering effect within the social and economic environment. The socialization of men to compete, behave assertively and act powerfully while women are socialized to care for the softer, emotional aspects of life are distinguishing roles that are transposed into the socio-economic arena. These variations of gender roles define behavior patterns of men and women and subsequently form the basis of development interventions aimed at ensuring equity among both genders. Thus, the culturally ascribed roles transcend the borders of the domestic space into the socio-economic domain. The result of this is a male dominated socio-economy. This suggests that culture plays a dominant role in women's decision making outcomes.

In support of the above stance, evidence from the literature revealed that in spite of women's resource contribution to the household economy, women only influenced those decisions culturally ascribed to them (GDHS, 2003, 2008; Warren, 2009; Adomako Ampofo, 1999). For example, Adomako Ampofo (1999) revealed that women influenced household decisions on at home, children's food at school and

children's clothes. This demonstrates the influence of the culture and further implies that culture cannot be overshadowed by economic factors.

While the above argument is true, it is also possible that women may gain leverage but choose not to exercise it because of a male dominant gender orientation. The choice not to exercise power may be tied to the fear of being labeled as “a male-woman”, a term associated with being a nonconformist to cultural ideals. In Akan society such women may be derogatively called “obaa barima”. Indeed, societal perceptions constitute a barrier to women's progress and development. Another factor that could give rise to this phenomenon is male chauvinism, usually expressed through the use of force and violence. In such an instance, women will feel intimidated and shy away from exercising power for fear of being abused. For instance, the literature showed that the threat of violence and abuse was used by men to control women's sexual and reproductive lives (Njovana and Watts, 1996; Bawah et al, 1999).

Women's bargaining power will not necessarily increase because they have been educated, have a job or are senior to their husbands. Women do not live in isolation of men. There is a prevailing cultural norm that determines gender relations and men become the beneficiaries of these relationships. As stated elsewhere, a male dominant orientation is most likely to undermine any policy and development intervention that may seek to empower women; and an egalitarian orientation for men will undermine any cultural ideological orientation women may have of themselves. Therefore, empowering women requires the inclusion of men and boys in the change process. Engaging men and boys in the attainment of gender equality in household decision

making necessitates not just education per se but also an awareness raising about the positive effects gender equality can have for them. While male dominant gender ideology promotes gender inequalities between men and women, men equally pay significantly in terms of their health, stress and pressure from work.

The literature also suggests male domination in household decisions that are traditionally female domain. For instance, men influenced decisions pertaining to daily expenditure on food – which is traditionally a female domain (Angel-Urdinola & Wodon, 2010; Adomako Ampofo, 1999). This outcome causes one to question the whole assumption that women even possess any traditionally mandated authority. Here, I will pose a hypothesis contrary to the conventional view: that while it may appear these decisions are traditionally assigned to females, it is possible that these are merely task management roles assigned to women by their spouses. The important distinction is between “task management” and “authority over decisions”. If this explanation is correct, it suggests that the conventional view may have understated the extent of men’s control over household decisions while overstating any women’s influence are assumed to extract from their traditionally ascribed roles. If we accept this view, the evidence of male dominance over domestic affairs should no longer be surprising

.After all, if one considers the amount of resources channeled into these daily activities that are managed by women, it should be normal to expect that the husband who is seen as the major contributor of these resources would be very interested in the outcome of these decisions, and would therefore influence these decisions. Thus, it is quite ‘rational’ for men to do this.

Indeed, the cultural ideological perspective does not suggest the structural perspective is dysfunctional in anyway, but rather, points to other alternatives to power acquisition by members of the household. For instance, Marc DeTurck and Gerald Miller (1986) and Kabeer (1997) have found that skills in communicating with a spouse affect marital power. Thus, communication skills in the form of coaxing and persuading may be used to appeal to the ego and conscience of a husband to turn household decisions in favor of women. Indeed, Rogers (1975) and Asante-Darko et al (1983) have described the lack of apparent power for women as a façade, hiding the equality between both sexes. Rogers and Asante-Darko et al., however, perceive female subservience as a power game in which women gain practical power in exchange for giving men public respect and status (Rogers, 1975; Asante-Darko et al., 1983).

While there may be some truth in this claim, the reviewed literature did not reflect this stance. Thus, its absence from the literature may imply one of two things: either that women interviewed by researchers are underestimating or underutilizing their full power potential or, the research is underestimating the actual power women have.

Do the structural perspectives matter in explaining household decision making? The discussion suggests that to some extent structural perspective may matter in specific areas. On the other hand the structural perspective may play a role in explaining the gap in resource contribution between spouses. The cultural ideological perspective is equally important in providing explanations to decision making outcomes. Gender orientation and the concept of hearth-hold may form the basis in providing a context for the power dynamics of the cultural perspective. While both perspectives are

important in providing compelling explanation of intra-household decision making in the African context, Adomako Ampofo (1999) has noted some limitations in deciphering the theoretical perspectives, since in one context, what may appear to be a structural perspective could also be seen as an indicator of the cultural perspective. An understanding of socio-cultural context could provide solution for the dilemma, in terms of policy formation and development interventions.

4.2 The Role of Context in Decision Making Outcome

The partial evidence for structural variables challenges the effectiveness of these variables. As indicated earlier, the non-efficiency of the structural variables cannot always be ascribed to the influence of culture. Likewise, the efficiency of the variable may not always be as a result of the variable itself. Indeed, the few empirical studies that have tried to examine the impact of context on individual outcomes have found that the contextual factors are far more important than the individual factors (Kritz et al., 1999).

Contextual issues arising from the reviewed literature included, rural and urban contexts, and matrilineal and patrilineal kinship structures. These variations in context were shown to affect decision making outcomes. Findings regarding the contexts within which women's decision making power are affected by education suggest that in certain settings, such as rural settings where patriarchal kinship structures are so deeply entrenched, education can not improve women's situation in any meaningful way (Glick & Sahn, 2000). Alternatively, in an urban cosmopolitan setting, the effect of education is most likely to have a significant impact on women's decision making in the household (Oppong, 1974; 1975).

Additionally, where studies showed a negative effect of education on women's decision making outcome (Ezeh, 1993; Dodoo, 1993; Hindin, 2000; GDHS, 2003), it is not education per se that was unbeneficial to women, rather, the context under consideration influenced the impact of education. The quality of that education may not transfer any knowledge on measures to empower women. Thus, where the surveyed literature failed to find a beneficial impact of education, the most likely explanation was that the research disregarded the components of education that are most important, such as a curriculum that promotes gender stereotypes. The Ghana Demographic Health Survey (GDHS, 2003) has also highlighted the relevance of the process of education, more importantly, the process of going to school and gaining exposure to new ideas. These are hypothesized to empower women to improve their own lives and those of their families.

The following studies ie. Opong (1974 & 1981), Opong et al (1975), Clark (1994) on the Akans of Ghana and Kathewera-Banda et al. (2011) on the Zomba of Malawi were examined with respect to their prevailing traditional lineage system, being matrilineal. This lineage system traces decent and inheritance through the family line of the mother. The Akan and Zomba women as a result have access to land, an important economic resource. Agarwal (1994) has argued that land defines social status and political power and structures relationship both within and outside the household. The Food and Agricultural Organisation (2002) further contends that there is a strong correlation between the decision making powers that a person enjoys and the quantity and quality of the land rights held by that person.

The above assertions may be true to some extent. This is because while Oppong (1974 & 1981), Oppong et al (1975) and Clark all reported a positive relationship between structural variables (ie. resource contribution and education) and women's decision making. Oppong et al (1975) reported a negative relationship. Thus, migrant women farmers who followed their husbands to a new cocoa area and assisted their husband on their farms or others farms were unable to influence decision because they had fewer resources. Customarily, an Akan wife has a more secure home and source of permanent maintenance with her own mother and siblings than with her husband. Wives who relocated with their husbands to different jurisdictions lost that social support system. Kathewera-Banda et al. (2011) also showed that access and control of resources did not lead to more bargaining power for women within the household. Among the Zomba's the husbands role as family head ensures that household decision making are his sole preserve no matter how much resources a wife controlled.

On the other hand, the following studies, Kritz and Makinwa-Adebusoye's (1999), Oluwatayo (2009) and Kathewera-Banda et al. (2011) revealed a consistent negative relationship between structural variables (resource contribution and education) and women's participation in household decision making in the study of patrilineal societies.

4.3 Conclusion

Comparing both theory and evidence it becomes clear that women's power positioning in the household can be improved. This can be achieved by targeting structural factors however, this is dependent on factors such as cultural and socio-economic variables. Therefore, in seeking intervention strategies to improve

women's decision-making power in the household, the appropriate intervention will be to unite the two schools of thoughts, that is, structure and culture. Indeed, the solution to gender inequality in the household is a structural one and while resource contribution, occupation and seniority are important, they are insufficient to bridge the inequality between both genders. Education is most important because it encapsulates the positive effects of resource contribution and occupation, while ensuring a re-orientation of ideologies. Though these are important, favorable socio-economic factors such as good public policies and an egalitarian gender orientation are important to ensure women's empowerment.

Contextual factors ranging from urban, rural, matrilineal, patrilineal to the content of educational curriculum were all influential. Also from the discussions above, culture was considered the most pervasive in promoting or inhibiting the process of women's empowerment. This is due to its ability to transcend the borders of the household into the economic sphere. The results of this are policies and development interventions which do very little in improving women's condition.

Finally, both theoretical perspectives; structural and cultural perspectives were considered important in providing compelling explanations of intra-household decision making in African context. While they are important, there is a thin line distinguishing these two perspectives. However, deeper understanding of socio-cultural context is most likely to create clear distinction between both theoretical perspectives for policy and intervention purposes.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction

The involvement of women in household decisions holds a number of implications for the national and regional development. However, economic and socio-economic limitations of women, as well as limitations created by aspects of the African culture exclude women's participation in decision making within the household. This dissertation examines how women's engagement in resources contribution, occupation, education and how seniority promotes or limits women's ability to influence household decisions. This chapter provides a summary of the study, major research findings, conclusions and recommendations for policy.

5.1 Summary of Study and Major Research Findings

The aim of this study was to investigate power dynamics regarding household decision making in relation to four (4) key variables; resource contribution, education, occupation and seniority. An analysis of power differential within the household, theories and concepts was made to explain the power variations between spouses. These theories were re-grouped into the structural perspective, which includes exploitative, neo-classical and bargaining theories, cultural ideological perspective, and social dominance theory. The objectives of this study were to establish which of the structural variable has the most influence over women's involvement in household decision making, determine the relative strength of culture in determining the power structure of the household as well as examine which theories provide a valid explanation of women's household decision making in the African context.

Drawing from reviewed literature, culture was considered the most pervasive in promoting or inhibiting the process of women's empowerment. This is due to its ability to transcend borders while forming the basis for some structural factors, policy and even development interventions. The role of culture is evidently strong in the household decision making process. Though culture has been proven to influence women's autonomy, it is unclear how much autonomy culture provides for women.

Again, cultural factors over the years have widened the gender gap. The relevance of structural variables is to minimize or mitigate the adverse effect of culture on women's decision making. Although, some structural variables have some degree of strength in improving women's participation in decision making, they are limited in sustaining women's empowerment. In ensuring women's participation in decision making, education is the most influential variable in this process. This is because education has a multi-dimensional effect which successfully improves women's resource wealth, and also promotes an egalitarian gender orientation. While education is important, a favorable socio-economic environment is equally important in improving women's participation in household decision making. Even though education is important it is not just any education per se that will be of benefit to women; the context and content of the education also matters.

From the empirical literature it was found that both the structural and cultural theories are plausible for explaining the power imbalance within the household. The opposing evidence of both culture and structure could be perceived as the two sides of a coin. While they may appear opposing, in order to improve women's power each perspective plays a significant role. Thus, policies and intervention must adopt the

above approach. This will ensure that while women's access to employment and education are being improved, psychological, social and legal reforms targeting cultural norms will be put in place.

5.2 Conclusions

Evidence from this study shows the importance of women's decision-making in the household. This work also established that women's acquisition of power is important for influencing household decisions. While structural factors such as occupation, resource contribution and seniority are important in determining power dynamics in the household, they have been proven to be insufficient in improving women's power. Education is however, very influential in promoting power sharing within the household. This is because it has the potential to counter the effects of culture in power relations, while equally improving structural components such as resource contribution, occupation. Finally, both the structuralist perspective and cultural ideological perspective play essential roles in explaining household decision making in Africa. A deeper understanding of socio-cultural context is however, important in distinguishing these two theoretical perspectives.

5.3 Recommendations

Issues of women's involvement in household decision-making are important not only to the household, but also hold implications for the growth of a country. Therefore, I would recommend that the government strengthens institutional arrangements to promote equal opportunities through improved access to education, credit facilities, employment, and land for both men and women. Additionally, governments must develop and promote gender-sensitive curricula and provide teacher training on civic

education for men and women. A body for monitoring and implementation of this policy must be established to ensure strict adherence in schools. These efforts will help re-orient mindsets from male dominance centeredness to the promotion of women's participation in household decision-making.

Considering the relative strength of culture on the effect of the structural variables, it is clear that although education can be used as an effective policy lever to increase women's ability to negotiate their participation in decision making, the issues of culture and other key risk factors must be addressed concurrently. Similarly, in the economic sphere, policies on girl child education ought to be combined with job creation in order to strengthen the claims of the structuralists.

Subsequently, it is important to note that Africa exists within a space of culture that is important to its people. Though, some traditional practices may hinder women's development, there exist some components of culture that are empowering to women. I recommend that African traditional and cultural concepts be reflected in the African development discourse for women's empowerment. As such, home grown models based on African historical and cultural experiences are crucial for the sustainable development of the continent.

Finally, another issue that emerged from the discussions was the lack of employment opportunities for educated women, which renders education for the purpose of employment, useless and ineffective. Indeed, Africa has a huge reservoir of tradition and indigenous knowledge which has sustained most societies for years. I therefore recommend that this knowledge should be tapped for employment and income

generating activities especially, in the face of growing unemployment and increasing poverty in the continent.

5.4 Recommendation for Future Research

The notion that women wield large quantity of practical power in the household should be subjected to further investigation. This is because this notion did not translate into decision making outcomes. Women's large quantity of practical power could not be accounted for due to methodological errors resulting in underestimating women's actual power.

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