

The Changing Dynamics of Family Formation:  
Women's Status and Nuptiality in Togo

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## Abstract

With the gradual evolution in women's status in sub-Saharan Africa, questions are raised concerning the likely impact of such changes on nuptiality and the family. Using data from the Togolese Demographic and Health Survey, this paper examines the relationship between women's status and nuptiality patterns. The paper focuses on women's independence from the family, as reflected in their freedom to chose their own partner, the prevalence of non-consanguineous unions, their ability to control income they earned before marriage, and their level of educational attainment. We examine the interrelationship between these indicators and patterns of union formation and marital disruption.

THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF FAMILY FORMATION:  
WOMEN'S STATUS AND NUPTIALITY IN TOGO

Introduction

Changing patterns of marriage and family formation in sub-Saharan Africa have become a subject of considerable interest. While modernization theory had predicted that the African family structure would evolve toward a western nuclear model (e.g., Caldwell, 1982; Goode, 1970), recent studies increasingly suggest that the changes in the African family are leading to a model that is neither purely traditional nor purely western (Kayongo-Male and Onyango, 1984; Locoh, 1990). Within this context, questions are often raised concerning the changing roles of women, and the implications of these changes for union formation and dissolution.

While a growing number of studies point to gradual changes in traditional African patterns of marriage, such as the erosion of the authority of kinship groups over the marriage process (Folbre, 1988: 69-75; Little, 1973: 130; Meekers, 1992), and increased levels of sexual activity and childbearing among unmarried women (Gage-Brandon and Meekers, 1992, 1993), there is little consensus on the impact of socioeconomic development on women's status per se. In one group of studies, it is argued that urbanization improves women's position by increasing their occupational opportunities and scope for financial independence (Dinan, 1977, 1983). Legal systems modelled after those that operate in Western countries are alleged to give women greater control over spouse choice and freedom to assert their independence from traditional male-dominated patterns of authority and control.

A second school of thought posits that the modernization process and colonialism undermined women's status in traditional society by widening the economic gap between men and women, and by denying women equal participation in the political and economic process. These latter studies emphasize that women face unequal educational and employment opportunities (Hyde, 1989), that women

have been largely ignored in agricultural innovation and in the allocation of credit (Gladwin and McMillan, 1989), that they were excluded from the cash economy upon the introduction of cash crops as "men's crops", and that they have been disenfranchised by land privatization which was directed to males (Feldman, 1984). These developments are believed to have increased, rather than decreased, African women's economic dependence upon men since the colonial period (e.g., Bohmer, 1980; Chapman Smock, 1977; MacGaffey, 1988; Ulin, 1992: 65).

This paper seeks to understand the relationship between women's status and nuptiality in Togo using data from the 1988 Togo Demographic and Health Survey. Togo has witnessed modest changes in social factors that may be associated with women's status. These changes include an increase in the percentage of the population living in urban areas from 10 per cent in 1960 to 25 per cent in 1981 (Agouké et al., 1989), and a slight drop in the illiteracy rate among women aged 15 years and over from 93 per cent in 1970 to 82 per cent in 1981 (UNESCO, 1987). However, Togo has experienced a gradual economic decline over the past 20 years. According to World Bank estimates, by 1987, the real Gross National Product per capita had fallen to its 1965 level (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 1991). The gradual economic crisis and the collapse of the plantation economy since 1950 have been associated with a reduction in the ability of men to provide for the family and with an increase in divorce rates between 1970 and 1976 (Vimard, 1983). In addition, the transformation of the mode of production from a collective system organized around the lineage to one based on individual production is considered to have increased marital mobility by further reducing the already weak conjugal ties and economic cooperation between spouses (Mignot, 1983; Vimard, 1984: 99). However, the relationship of these changes to the status of women in Togo remains unclear.

In this paper, the following question is of interest: To what extent has women's status changed over time and how has it affected nuptiality patterns? The first part of the paper explores the linkages between women's status and

nuptiality in sub-Saharan Africa in general. Our intention in this section is not to present a theoretical discussion of the definition of women's status - a highly elusive concept in most settings - but rather, to discuss the impact of women's changing socioeconomic status on the timing of marriage, the type of unions formed, the deviation of the marital relationship from the traditional, and union stability. In the second section, results are presented on family formation and women's status in Togo. The third section discusses marital dissolution in relation to women's status.

#### Women's Status and Nuptiality: Exploring the Linkages

There have been few empirical studies linking women's status to nuptiality in Africa. Existing studies have largely focussed on the spread of female education, and its impact on the postponement of marriage. By comparing different age cohorts of women, these studies show a dramatic decline in the proportion of women who have had no formal schooling, and some progress in secondary or higher education in some countries. These developments are related to the decline in teenage marriage over time.

Although it is generally accepted that union types and the role of the family or kinship group in spouse-choice are undergoing gradual change, little is actually known about the extent to which such changes are the product of an increase in women's status, or of the general process of economic and social change. Thus it has been observed in several large urban centers that informal unions have become increasingly common over time (Vimard, 1984), and that there has been a decline in the prevalence of cross-cousin marriages (Fortes, 1950 on the Ashanti of Ghana) and child betrothals (Etienne, 1986 on the Baoulé of Côte d'Ivoire). These processes are attributed more to the impact of socioeconomic development on the African family and on the degree of control exercised by parents and elders over children and youth in general than to the gains which women as a group have made in controlling the nuptiality process. Nevertheless,

it is generally agreed that some of the legal changes which were instituted during the colonial period considerably increased women's nuptiality rights, at least in theory. These new legislations attempted to prevent unwanted marriages by abolishing child marriages for girls and establishing a minimum legal age at marriage. However, it is also acknowledged that legislation has been largely ineffective in enforcing these rights in practice (Cartry, 1966: 73; Pilon, 1988).

There is little empirical information on the extent to which non-traditional roles for women impinge on the balance of power between husband and wife and on decision-making within the marital unit. The crucial question is whether new roles for women promote a deviation from the traditionally subservient positions that wives hold in relation to their husbands. From a demographic and social perspective, it is important to assess whether the institution of marriage or the stability of unions is threatened by the inability or unwillingness of husbands to adapt to wives' changing position within the family, or the inability or unwillingness of "higher status wives" to accept a traditional position of paying deference to their husbands.

Various view points highlight the tensions that may arise in marital unions and that may threaten union stability when women adopt non-traditional roles. A first group of studies examine husband's attitudes towards women's cash work that is independent of the family's economic structure and framework, and their views regarding women's participation in occupations that were originally attributed to men. A second group of studies look at the decision-making process within the marital unit and the extent to which wives' improved socioeconomic status engenders a deviation from what is perceived as the traditional context within which decision-making takes place among married couples.

The emancipation of African women within the family is a nebulous concept. Even when there is an increase in female education this does not guarantee the

improvement of women's status within marital unions. It is noteworthy that even in Western societies, university educated women did not gain substantial decision-making power because of the persistence of the image that women are inferior (Steady, 1981: 26). Similarly, in most African societies husbands' views concerning authority, respect and gender roles remain virtually unchanged regardless of their level of education and of that of their spouses (Dinan, 1977: 164; Namuddu, 1991: 457). The following quote is characteristic of the social distance that is present even in relations among educated couples:

'[The husbands] always remind you, no matter how educated you are, that you remain inferior to them. He is the boss in the house. Your mind is not as good as theirs, even if you have a university degree... The minute you put on the ring the trouble starts' (quoted in van der Vliet, 1991: 236).

Several reports suggest that men often prefer uneducated wives to educated ones, for the latter tend to be difficult to control (Namuddu, 1991: 457; Obbo, 1987: 270). In most African societies education is not the main determinant of women's status. The prestige or respect that the society accords women in general is still more closely linked to their roles as wives and mothers than to the new roles that they perform, and these traditional family priorities and values are enforced by the society which often judges any change in sex roles within marital unions as deviant or a threat to male authority. Parents may not be inclined to educate their daughters, because of the fear that educated women will quarrel with their uneducated co-wives and oppose the authority of the husband whose bridewealth they have received (Bledsoe, 1990: 120). Little (1973: 168) remarked that men had favored female education originally, on the assumption that it would make their wives better housekeepers and mothers, but that they now fear that educated women will challenge their authority. In extreme cases, a change in sex roles within marriage may even be perceived by the society to be a product of witchcraft perpetuated by domineering wives against 'soft' husbands. Namuddu (1991) thus warns against viewing the increase in status brought about by female education simplistically, for education does not necessarily imply that women can

translate their unique position into status in the community. Men disapprove of highly educated women, because they are aware that female education is eroding their superior status in society. Hence, female education will only improve women's status if accompanied by a change in cultural values, in particular the culturally appropriate roles for men and women which until today have been largely unaffected by education.

Studies examining men's attitudes towards new roles for women observe that even though men accept the need for wives to work, they are opposed to women becoming too ambitious, too independent, or too successful. In most societies women's economic position has been affected by a

...traditional opposition to the idea of wives working. [...] Fears were expressed that women who went out to work would not bear children, and this objection was particularly strong when the employment of wives involved being under the authority of a man who was not their husband. [...] In the view of some men, for a wife to earn money not only constitutes a threat to a husband's authority and to his ability to control her, but may enable her to abscond (Little, 1973: 38).

The independent activities of the wives are seen as subordinate to those of the household enterprise, and are to be performed during the wife's 'spare time' (Roberts, 1988: 104-105). Women's own-account activities may be considered in conflict with the interests of the household because they consume part of her labor time that would otherwise be devoted to the household. Needless to say that some men may feel threatened by the economic strength of their wives and seek to enforce traditional authority (Karanja, 1981; Lim, 1991; MacGaffey, 1988: 165). In a study of Lagos, Karanja (1981: 62) found that most males do not resent women working per se, but that they do oppose women becoming too ambitious and successful on the account that such women poorly perform their roles as wives and mothers. A study of Cameroon suggests that many men do not allow their wife to work because of fears that they will become too independent when they have their own income (De Lancey, 1981: 16-17). Little (1973: 184) points out that some men actively request the termination of their wives' employment contract,

and do indeed succeed in their attempts, if they feel threatened by her higher income. In Zaire, a new legislation reinforces and strengthens the traditional authority of the husband over his wife by restricting her independent activities (MacGaffey, 1988: 163-164). According to the new laws, a woman cannot obtain a commercial license, or even open a bank account, without her husband's permission. Moreover, although a woman has the right to sign a labor contract and to engage in wage labor, she cannot enforce this right if her husband objects to her employment. A husband can legally terminate his wife's employment contract by simply informing her employer in writing that he disapproves of her employment. If the husband does allow his wife to work, he has the legal right to control her income, if he deems this to be in the best interest of the household.

Not surprisingly, the persistence of the traditional subordination of women increasingly leads to tension within the union, especially among better educated women. In their attempts to seek relief from these tensions women appear to have chosen two major strategies. Numerous studies indicate that an increasing number of women attempt to escape male authority by avoiding formal marriage in favour of informal unions. Alternatively, those women who do enter a formal marriage may attempt to renegotiate their status within the union, or if such fails, may contemplate breaking the marriage. In other words, women, as are men, are social actors who use various strategies in an attempt to achieve their goals and to cope with oppressive social structures (Dinan, 1977: 159). As Dorjahn (1990: 170) puts it, marital relations are 'as a game in which the players try to manipulate people and situations so as to maximize satisfactions.' Divorce is one of many options to reduce marital tension:

Divorce is a widespread method of dealing with the inevitable, ubiquitous disharmonies of married life. But it is not the only one. Societies also attempt to lower people's expectations about marriage, to socialize spouses to "adjust" to its disappointments, or, by laying less stress on the husband-wife relationship and more on relations with the larger kin network, attempt to reduce the impact of husband-wife conflict. Should the tension rise to a level considered unbearable in the society, divorce may be an acceptable solution (Goody, 1963: 195, cited in Dorjahn, 1990: 171).

Often it is in women's interest to avoid the tensions that arise from the power relations between husbands and wives in formal marriages. In most cases entering a formal union implies that a woman loses her independence and becomes subjected to the authority of her husband who may attempt to restrict his wife's freedom or may try to control her earnings (Bledsoe, 1980: 150). For women it is possible to avoid or at least reduce male domination by steering clear from formal marriages, i.e. bridewealth marriages (Oppong, 1980: 202; Parpart, 1988: 124). There is increasing evidence that a selected but significant group of women deliberately avoid formal marriages, at least temporarily, in an attempt to maintain their autonomy. For example, among the Kpelle of Liberia women who have been able to acquire wealth independently prefer to lead a single life, until they can marry a man who can greatly elevate their wealth or status; should such a husband start making claims on the woman's own wealth, then it is likely that she will divorce him (Bledsoe, 1980: 152). Consensual unions tend to be less restrictive than formal marriages, because men in such unions have less claims on women's wages (Ulin, 1992: 66). Of course, this strategy of avoiding formal marriage is generally only available to those women who are sufficiently resourceful, such as professional women and other women who are engaged in wage labor (Bledsoe, 1990: 3; Oppong, 1980: 206). Others are said to enter informal unions because they do not believe that marriage will give them sufficient affection and conjugal solidarity (Dinan, 1977; Oppong, 1980: 205).

Whether the tensions produced in marital unions by women's changing roles actually lead to divorce is only a matter of conjecture. In most societies, the single state is not considered to be a socially viable and acceptable option for women.<sup>1</sup> Faced with restricted marriage markets, high status, economically independent women may cling to traditional family values and may be more likely than traditional women to maintain unsatisfactory unions. Of course, the satisfaction sought in marriage varies from person to person. Some women may try to satisfy the needs of their kinship group, rather than their own (Dorjahn, 1990: 170). For example, among the Temne of Sierra Leone women from poor

families who had married a wealthy man were more willing to adapt to the behavior of their husband because maintaining the marriage was important for the economic well-being of their kinship group.<sup>2</sup> Other women who are unwilling to compromise their economic independence, authority and decision-making abilities may be more likely to divorce than to let their husband's authority go unchallenged. Still, educated women who marry men as educated as themselves are perceived to enjoy more egalitarian husband-wife relations than uneducated women. Women who work outside the family tend to enjoy more control over financial resources and tend to participate more in household decision-making, especially in matters concerning fertility and contraceptive use, than women whose work is restricted to their husband's enterprises or farms.

It is clear from the literature that in the context of the dual legal system found in a large number of sub-Saharan countries, the impact of women's status on divorce partly operates through union type - whether consensual, civil/religious or traditional - and the varying legal structures that these union types imply. Although the vast majority of marriages occurring in Africa are carried out according to traditional procedures, often entailing the exchange of bridewealth, an increasing numbers of unions among educated women, though initially concluded in the traditional manner, are finalized by civil processes subject not to the customary court but to western-type legislation. These different legal systems imply different rules governing child custody and the division of marital property upon union dissolution. Bearing in mind gender biases in land/property ownership, the legal systems governing marriage therefore imply different degrees to which women can maintain an independent existence outside of a marital relationship without losing their children (i.e. their insurance in old age) and the contributions they have made to developing the husband's property. Hence, legal systems govern the extent to which women perceive marital dissolution as an economic risk and consequently, their willingness to dissolve unsatisfactory marriages.

In polygynous unions, women's status within the marriage is not only determined by the wives' socioeconomic position relative to that of their husbands. It also revolves around more traditional notions of wife rank and differentiation among co-wives on the basis of age, education and family background. Although in theory all the wives in a polygynous unions are supposed to be treated equally, the senior wife is often accorded higher status than the junior wives and may be instrumental in the choice of her co-wives. In a society that is highly differentiated by age, the relatively narrow age gap between the senior wife and the polygynous husband, and the sometimes wide age gap between the senior and junior wives necessarily translates into an important status hierarchy among co-wives that may only be challenged by their relative fertility, or by their relative number of sons. It is observed that higher levels of education and urbanization are associated with lower levels of polygyny, but the relationship may be spurious because formal polygyny is modified into an informal institution of 'girl-friends' or 'outside wives' (Clignet, 1987; Karanja, 1987, 1988; Lacombe, 1983, 1987).

The education gap between husband and wife is equally important in determining women's relative status within marital unions. The interaction between the age gap and the education gap may influence the marital choices that women make. Even when spouses have the same level of education, the age gap between spouses means that husbands have had more time to develop their careers and to establish a higher standard of living than their wives. This point may also be important in determining who women marry, and how they weigh the economic losses that they would undergo should their marriages be dissolved. In the following sections, we will investigate, to the extent possible, how various measures of women's status condition marital choices.

## Data and Variables

The Togo Demographic and Health Survey of 1988 is particularly suited for this analysis. Unlike other Demographic and Health Surveys conducted in Africa, the data set contains a marital history. In addition to questions pertaining to the dates at which each union started, its current status, and if dissolved the date and manner of dissolution, the marital history contains information on the ethnicity of each partner, the number of wives in each union, and wife rank at the start of the union. Of utmost importance for our analysis is the fact that the data include information of the role of the family in the formation of the respondent's last union: partner choice (husband chosen by the family; by the wife with parental approval; by the wife without asking parental approval) and the relationship of women to their husbands (non-relative; paternal cousin; maternal cousin; other relative). Furthermore, there is information on the type of the last union (whether civil, religious, customary, or consensual), on wage employment before first marriage, and control over the disbursement of the income earned before first marriage.

The setting in which marriage takes place is crucial for understanding the interrelationships between women's status and nuptiality patterns. In the TDHS, our main referents of women's status in the family are the partner choice and the relationship of the women to their husbands. Marriage to a paternal cousin may influence marital stability while marriage to a non-relative may increase the chance of the union dissolving because of the varying degrees of female autonomy that are implied by these marital arrangements. In the same manner, the ability of women to make independent partner choice is a measure of women's autonomy within her family. When the family plays a deciding role in partner choice, the stability of the union may be less related to a woman's independent evaluation of her costs and benefits of staying in the union than to considerations regarding family welfare (Dorjahn, 1990: 170). These interrelationships may also enhance our understanding of the mechanisms by which men dominate women by

controlling the process of marriage and family formation (see for example, Meillassoux, 1975).

Women's educational attainment is used as a measure of the possession of a valued resource in the modern economy. It governs access to socially meaningful, prestigious and wage-earning jobs other than agriculture and trade which have been women's traditional domain. Education may not only condition when and whom women marry, it may also be associated with a severe dislocation between domestic status and the actual economic and professional status of wives with adverse consequences for marital stability.

The education of women relative to the education of their spouses is a measure of women's relative status within the marital union (what has been called 'structural power' by O'Connor, 1991). It is hypothesized that when educated women have attained a level of education equal to or higher than that of their husbands, the system of exchange between the sexes may be disrupted, and traditional patterns of subordination to male authority may be challenged. Obbo (1987: 272) suggests it may be embarrassing for a male to have married a partner with a higher level of education (and consequently a higher income), and argues that male hypergamy is often not publicly disclosed. In these cases a union may dissolve if men are unwilling or unable to accept and adapt to women's changing roles or if women are reluctant to observe and accept the husband-wife relationships that prevail in traditional society. Hence, although male hypergamy is much less common than female hypergamy, these cases may be important to gain a better understanding of the changing nature of husband-wife relationships (Obbo, 1987: 278).

Although women in West Africa have often had control over income from their labour (Chapman Smock, 1977: 196; Nukunya, 1969: 156), especially from agriculture and trade, they were generally still dependent on men to gain access to land and to provide them with the necessary capital to start trading (Nukunya,

1969: 94-95). Recent opportunities for wage labour in the modern sector, especially in urban areas, allow women to accumulate independent wealth. It is when women become economically self-sufficient that they become truly independent from men, and that they acquire the option of marrying or remaining single and attempt to advance their personal careers (Dinan, 1977: 161). Likewise, when women are economically independent of their husbands they are able to put their income aside in case the union should break up or the husband should die (Karanja, 1981: 59). Many women are postponing marriage in order to acquire independent wealth which they can invest (in land, or in their own extended family) for future security (Dinan, 1977: 170). We measure women's premarital economic independence with a variable indicating whether the respondent was involved in wage labour before marriage, and if so, whether she exercised control over the income thus earned.

We focus not only on women as family members subject to certain familial obligations (which may determine their level of independence in making marriage choices), but we also seek to understand variations in the cultural context. Therefore, we have incorporated ethnic variations in our analysis and also have paid attention to the situation of women who are not of the same ethnic background as their partners. Scattered reports suggest that interethnic unions are more common among the wealthier and better educated classes (Obbo, 1987: 272; Pontié, 1981: 57-58). These women in interethnic marriages may be described as being "torn between cultures" (see Imamura, 1990, for a discussion of conflicts in international marriages in Nigeria). Such an exposure to different cultural orientations may imply different socialization processes concerning women's position vis-à-vis men, which may have an impact on marital stability.

## Empirical Results

### Trends in Women's Status and Marital Patterns

What gains have there been in the status of Togolese women over time? Although cross-sectional data is essentially of limited value for the analysis of trends, this question can be addressed by assessing whether there has been significant change in the relevant indicators of women's status across successive first marriage cohorts. For this purpose, we have identified 3 first marriage cohorts: Before 1970, 1970-79 and 1980-88.

One of the most important trends in women's status involve a diminishing family control over the marriage process, leading to a decline in arranged marriages (e.g., Cartry, 1966: 71; Froelich, Alexandre, and Cornevin, 1963: 43, 109, on the Kotokoli and Kabré; Locoh, 1990; Meekers, 1992; Nukunya, 1969: 78, 179, on the Anlo Ewe). Table 1 shows that there has been a substantial shift from arranged marriages towards greater individuality in partner choice. However, it is important to note that the extent of freedom of partner choice is not a simple dichotomy but a continuum (see also Feyisetan and Bankole, 1991: 273, on Nigeria). At the one extreme are women whose marriages are arranged by their family, and at the other extreme are women who choose their partners without the advise of family members. The distinctions between these two categories are blurred. As indicated by the data, the largest group is composed of women who choose their own spouse but with the approval of their family, a reflections of the considerable variability in the degree of family involvement in spouse choice. From the point of view of women's control over the marriage process, it is unclear whether the shift from arranged marriages towards marriages with family approval represents the continued significance of family influence over women's marital and domestic behaviour, including fertility decisions, or whether it is an indication of women's autonomy in marital decision-making within their natal families. Accompanying the shift towards greater individuality in partner choice is the declining significance of marriage

between relatives. Traditionally, most ethnic groups in Togo expressed a preference for cousin marriages (Froelich, Alexandre, and Cornevin, 1963: 30; Manoukian, 1952: 24-25; Nukunya, 1969: 71-76; Verdon, 1983: 173-177). Consequently, traditionally arranged marriages are frequently consanguineous unions. As one moves from the arranged marriage to independent partner choice, the percentage of women who marry non-relatives increases. Table 1 shows that the prevalence of consanguineous unions has declined from 41% among women who first married before 1970 to 32% for those whose first unions were initiated after 1980.

Table 1 about here

Relatively little progress has been made in women's cash work before marriage and their control of the income thus earned. This may be partly attributed to the rise in female education, and consequently to competition between time spent in school and in income-generating activities. Over 60 per cent of Togolese women who engaged in cash work before marriage were in full control of the disbursement of their incomes, confirming the fact that the majority of African women have traditionally retained control of income derived from their independent economic activities (Froelich, Alexandre and Cornevin, 1963: 40). However, women may not enjoy the same control of independently earned income within marriage. Several studies indicate that husbands often object to their wives' independent cash earning activities, and that those husband who allow their wives to work obtain make claims on their income (Little, 1973: 184; MacGaffey, 1988: 163-165; Roberts, 1988: 104-105).

With regard to women's education, increases are evident in the attainment of primary and secondary level education across marriage cohorts. However, the improvements in women's education appear to be greater for primary than for secondary or higher schooling. In recent years, there have also been significant changes in the relative education of the spouses, which reflect the gains made

in both male and female education over time. The proportion of first unions in which both spouses are uneducated has declined from 59 percent for union contracted before 1970 to 25 percent in the 1980s. At the same time, there has been a substantial increase in the occurrence of unions in which both spouses have the same level of education (from 6% to 18%), and in which husbands are more educated than wives (from 23% to 41%). In only 6 per cent of all unions have women attained a higher level of education than their spouse.

Before examining the relationship between women's status and marital patterns, it is important to examine some of the changes in marital patterns that are occurring concurrently with the changes in our indicators of women's status. Table 2 shows that over the last 20-30 years, there has been a slight decline in the propensity of teenage marriage, especially before age 16. This trend is commensurate with what has been observed in much of sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Vimard, 1984: 98-99 on North-West Togo). It is also observed that interethnic marriages have increased slightly, although over 75 per cent of unions still occur within the same ethnic group.<sup>3</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, the proportion of women who always lived with their husband declined over time. This pattern of non-coresidence of the spouses has also been observed by Locoh (s.d.: 7-8), who attributes it both to socioeconomic development and an adoption of matrilineal features from the Akan of neighbouring Ghana. The most impressive changes have occurred in polygynous marriages. Since the distribution of women by the number of wives in the union may be influenced by duration of marriage, wife rank at the start of a polygynous union gives a better indicator of changes in polygyny as an institution. The data reveal that for women whose first marriage was polygynous, there has been a decline in the proportion who entered as senior wives with a corresponding increase in the proportion entering polygynous unions as second wives. It is worthwhile to point out that there has also been a noticeable increase in monogamous unions over time and a 50 per cent decline in unions with three or more wives. However, as stated earlier, these cohort differentials may be partly a reflection of duration of marriage.

Table 2 about here

Women's Status and Union Formation

So far we have demonstrated modest changes in women's status and in marriage patterns across successive marriage cohorts. But what is the relationship of women's status to nuptiality patterns? Previous research on Togo has pointed to an increased occurrence of consensual unions and a decline in the influence of the family in the marriage process and the stability of the union. Such changes are often attributed to rising socioeconomic development and the break down of the family's control over the lives of its members. Undoubtedly, the adoption of western notions of "romantic love" may be affecting not only the way in which relationships are contracted, but also the degree to which couples know each other prior to the formalization of the union.

If individual's perceptions and behaviour with regard to nuptiality are affected by their positions in their social world, then one would expect that the higher the status of women, the greater the deviation of nuptiality patterns from what is defined as traditional. We recognize though that in the area of union formation, women operate within the constraints set up by the societies in which they live. Under such constraints, the single woman may be frowned upon and decisions regarding partner choice may be moulded by family expectations that are expressed overtly or with great subtleness. Thus, the impact of women's status on marital patterns could depend upon their ability and willingness to face social opposition to union patterns that deviate from normative prescriptions.

Table 3 provides some indication of the impact of women's status on various nuptiality indicators. It is evident that the formation of consensual unions is most affected by the degree of autonomy exercised by women in partner choice. About 63 per cent of women who married without family advice are in consensual unions compared to 18 per cent of those whose marriages were arranged. These

findings are consistent with those of Vimard (1981: 3-5; 1984: 96), who also attributed the increase in consensual unions observed in the Dayes plateau in South-West Togo to a decrease in parental and lineage authority. Differentials by level of education reveal that the prevalence of consensual unions is greatest among primary educated women, and among educated women whose partners have an equal or higher level of education. Furthermore, women who are in union with an 'other relative' are considerably less likely to be in a consensual union than those women who have a union with a non-relative or a cousin.

Table 3 about here

On the one hand, consensual unions may be regarded as a stage in the marriage process during which formalization procedures or bridewealth payments may be initiated or finalized. Research on Côte d'Ivoire has revealed that consensual unions are more likely to be formalized by civil/religious or customary ceremonies than to be voluntarily dissolved (Brandon, 1991). On the other hand, the dissociation of family involvement in partner choice and the formation of consensual unions suggests that these unions were probably subject to family or social criticism. Female autonomy in decision-making regarding partner choice or the allocation of income may be associated with a resistance to family pressure and the development of a more individualistic orientation, with implications for family building strategies. Indeed, consensual unions may be more associated with personal and emotional considerations than with those of the family.

The status of women has often been related to their age at first marriage. It is argued that early marriage for women not only reduces the time that they have to take advantage of economic opportunities that are independent of their families, but it is also directly associated with disparities in educational attainment between husbands and wives, and a relatively wide age gap between spouses which may affect women's relative ability to take crucial decisions

within the household. However, it is important to keep in mind that although there are clear associations between women's status and age at first marriage, these are not necessarily causal relationships. In Table 3, we present the relationship between our women's status indicators and the proportion of women first marrying at age 20 years or older.

The most conclusive findings on the relationship between women's status and the age at first marriage are obtained for the education indicators. Women with secondary or higher education are more than twice as likely to marry at age 20 or older as those with no education, a pattern that is firmly established in the literature. Conjugal equality in the level of educational attainment is related to an older age at first marriage. The relationship between spouse choice and the age at first marriage is also worthy of note, teenage marriage being more associated with direct family involvement in spouse-choice than with "indirect" family influence or self-choice. Note that although the spousal difference in the level of education is zero for both uneducated couples and couples with the same level of education, these two groups exhibit different nuptiality patterns.

Three other areas of nuptiality have been identified as being susceptible to change as women's status improves. These are ethnic homogamy, cohabitation of spouses and entry into polygynous unions. From Table 3, it appears that families are losing their control over the marriage of females in many ways. A reduction in the role of the family in the selection of marriage partners is associated with an increased likelihood that women marry outside their ethnic group, with less continuous cohabitation of spouses, and with a decline in the proportion of women entering polygynous unions. Indeed patriarchal and matriarchal authority over women often assume ethnic dimensions which are reflected in the higher proportion of interethnic marriages among unrelated couples than among women who are related to their partners.

Work experience before marriage and independent control of cash income do not appear to be related to the formation of interethnic unions, cohabitation of spouses or entry into monogamous unions. Given that education familiarizes individuals with experiences different from their own, it is not surprising that the proportion of women in interethnic unions increases with their level of educational attainment, and that these unions are more prevalent among couples with the same level of education than among uneducated couples.

Several authors have argued that non-cohabitation (which is often a product of migration) may increase women's relative autonomy in decision-making and their control over resources depending upon the family structure within which women reside upon the temporary separation of spouses. There are also situations where women's greater access to education may motivate them to migrate, leading to the pattern of a rise in the prevalence of non-continuous cohabitation with increasing levels of education (see Table 3). Although the cultural situation sometimes dictates that women remain with their families of origin during the early stages of marriage, it is unlikely that this may account for the observed patterns. It is also unlikely that the negative relationship between education and continuous cohabitation is a product of non co-residential polygyny given that propensity to enter polygynous unions declines significantly with the level of education.

#### Women's Status and Union Dissolution

Our analysis of the impact of women's status on union stability is based on current status data and focusses on the probability that the respondent's last union ended in divorce. Using a cox hazard model, we regress the probability of divorce on three major groups of independent variables: women's status indicators, respondent's characteristics and characteristics of union formation. We have analyzed the data separately for rural and urban areas in order to

examine whether the impact of women's status on marital stability differs in tradition-oriented and modern-oriented settings.

Our indicators of women's status include spouse choice, relationship to husband, respondent's education, respondent's education in relation to that of her husband, and the respondent's cash work and control of income earned before marriage. Recognizing that women's status is also reflected indirectly in patterns of union formation, we have also included the following variables in our analysis: whether or not the respondent married before age 20, the union order, whether the union is a consensual union or a formal union, whether or not the respondent married within her ethnic group, whether or not the respondent cohabited continuously with her husband, and the respondent's rank in the last union. Our measures of respondent's other characteristics are respondent's age and ethnic group. With the exception of union order, duration of the union and respondent's age, all independent variables are dichotomous, 1 indicating that the respondent exhibits the relevant characteristic, and 0, otherwise.

The distribution and means of the variables used in the regression analysis are presented in Table 4. Women's status is reflected not only in their levels of educational attainment, control of income earned before marriage, and control over partner selection but also in union type. It is evident that the lineage still has a lot of control over the marriage process. Only about one out of every ten women has chosen her spouse without asking parental consent, and one in two women ended up marrying a relative. Consensual unions, over which the lineage has relatively little control, remain uncommon. However, although women appear to have little control over the marriage process, they have a fair amount of control over the income they earn. Consistent with the literature, table 4 shows that the majority of women who were involved in cash employed before they were married controlled their income personally. In general, the differences between rural and urban areas are small. However, urban women do tend to marry much later than rural women, and they are also more likely to enter an

interethnic marriage. Urban women are more educated than rural women, but even in urban areas it remains uncommon that a women has an equal or higher level of education than her partner.

Table 4 about here

Table 5 presents the results of our analysis, based on the cox hazard model. The results indicate that the prominent role played by the family in the establishment of unions extends to the maintenance of union stability. When women assert their freedom from matriarchal or patriarchal authority, unions are more likely to be unstable. This is reflected not only in urban areas but also in rural areas and is evident when women exercise independence in partner choice and in marriage to non-relatives. For example, in urban areas, women who choose their own spouse without the advice of their family are significantly more likely to divorce as those for whom the family played a direct or indirect role in partner choice. A separate analysis indicated that there was no significant difference in the likelihood of divorce between women whose partners were chosen by the family and those whose partners were chosen with the advice of the family (not shown). Moreover, in urban areas, the risk of divorce associated with marriage to non-relatives is higher than that for consanguineous unions. These results indicate that the traditional family system not only controls the marriage process, but also plays a role in maintaining the union during periods of marital discord. In the traditional setting, the lineage has a clear incentive to discourage union disruption, since the bridewealth usually needs to be returned when the divorce is initiated by the woman (see Manoukian, 1952: 27; Verdon, 1982, 1983). Consequently, as long as the power of the lineage is strong, women have little choice but to oblige to the wishes of the family and continue the union. When the ties between the individual and the lineage weaken (as in the case of consensual unions or of individual partner choice) women may not be willing to consider the continuation of an unsatisfactory union, even if

such would be in the interests of the family. Our data do not provide us with information on who initiated the divorce proceedings, but previous studies suggest that divorce proceedings in Togo are initiated almost exclusively by women (Locoh, 1983: 58-59; Manoukian, 1952: 27; Mignot, 1983; Nukunya, 1969: 107; Verdon, 1982: 55). The explanation for this unexpected pattern is not that women have such a high status in Togolese society, but rather that because of polygyny men do not need to dissolve an unsatisfactory marriage, since they always have the option of marrying an additional wife (Nukunya, 1969: 108). For a woman, on the other hand, getting a divorce is the only way to start a new marriage, or even to end an unsatisfactory union.

Table 5 about here

As expected, women's education is negatively and significantly related to union stability in both urban and rural areas. However, the data do not provide support for the argument that marital instability may result from the fact that the traditional pattern of subordination is challenged when women obtained higher levels of education than their partners (O'Connor, 1991; Obbo, 1987). After controlling for other factors, it is women's education per se and not their level of educational attainment relative to that of their spouses that determines union stability. Further analysis (not shown) confirms that among educated women, there are no significant differences in the likelihood of divorce between women who did not know their husband's education, those with a lower level of educational attainment than their husbands and those with the same or a higher level. Wage work before first marriage has a relatively weak and not significant effect on divorce.

Although they are not direct indicators of women's status, some of the other control variables indirectly measure the respondent's control over union formation. For example, consensual unions may be indicative of lack of commitment to the relationship, of deviance, or of an initial stage in the

prolonged process of marriage formation, but by virtue of their informal nature consensual unions are also a manifestation of women's independence in partner choice. As the results in table 5 indicate, in both urban and rural areas, consensual unions are significantly more likely to break up than formal unions. This conclusion had also been reached in a study of the Dayes plateau in Togo, which found that 15% of women in consensual unions are divorced, as opposed to only 3% for traditional unions, and 0% for religious and civil unions. According to Vimard (1984: 97), these differentials in marital instability by type of union reflect lineage power. Studies among the Abutia Ewe and Moba-Gourma have also shown that informal unions have higher divorce rates than traditional marriages controlled by the lineage (Pilon, 1988: 13-14; Verdon, 1982). Furthermore, in rural settings the rank of the wife in the union -- a traditional indicator of women's status within the union-- is an important determinant of union stability. Women who entered unions as sole or senior wives are significantly less likely to divorce than second or higher order wives. The findings on union order suggest though that divorce may be a selective process. The greater the number of times married, the more likely it is that a divorce occurs.

Although the impact of women's status on marital stability does not appear to vary between urban and rural areas, coresidence of partners has strikingly different impacts on divorce in these two settings. While in the total sample, women who have always lived with their husband have significantly lower probabilities of divorce than those who have not, this effect pertains solely to rural women. In urban areas, coresidence has a significantly destabilizing effect on marriages.<sup>4</sup> The reasons for this difference are not entirely clear, but it is likely that temporary separations may be a means of reducing marital tension. In urban areas, both men and women are taking advantage of alternative residence patterns (i.e., non-cohabitation) as a means to form new types of unions that are neither purely modern nor purely traditional, and which reduce or minimize friction between the traditional and the urban culture (Locoh, 1990: 30-31). If such separations do indeed reduce tensions, then it becomes clear why

continuous coresidence of the spouses may be associated with a greater likelihood of divorce in urban areas. In rural areas, on the other hand, separations tend to indicate the end of the union, rather than an attempt to avoid or reduce conflict between the traditional and modern ways of life.

### Conclusion

Our analysis has highlighted that there has been a tendency toward women's increased freedom from the control exercised by the family over the process of union formation. The distancing of women from their families in matters of spouse choice and their greater access to education are associated not only with an increased propensity to postpone marriages beyond the teenage years but also with an increased likelihood of entering marriages that are consensual, inter-ethnic or monogamous. Moreover, in both rural and urban areas, women's increasing independence from family control and their educational status have a negative impact on union stability.

The literature suggests that even though women's status may be undergoing change, it is possible that key aspects of the conjugal relationship such as role expectations, the degree of closeness between couples or the nature of the sentimental and economic ties that bind spouses may have remained unchanged, leading to a divergence between women's marital expectations and the pervasiveness of their social reality. Unfortunately, few studies have examined the extent to which women's freedom from family control, their economic independence and power vis-à-vis husband's emanating from their access to resources may intensify conjugal role strain and role conflict, hence marital discord. If women's increasing status does indeed exacerbate marital conflict, the results imply that it may be difficult to preserve union stability if an improvement in the condition of women is not accompanied by appropriate changes in other spheres, particularly the power and authority structures that govern marriages.

## Notes

1. Note that this pressure to be married generally results in fast remarriage (see Locoh, 1983: 58; Mignot, 1983: 142-143)
2. The argument that women often engage in particular unions in order to please the lineage, is further supported by the finding that among those women who chose and married their partner without asking parental consent, one out of four women married a relative (Meekers, 1992).
3. Calculations are based on the detailed classification of ethnic groups used in the TDHS, rather than on the four major ethnic clusters.
4. A separate analysis (not shown) revealed that the urban-rural differences in the pattern of effect of coresidence of spouses is significant at the .001 level.

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Table 1. Cohort trends in women's status in Togo

Variable	Year of first marriage			
	Before 1970	1970-1979	1980-1988	All cohorts
<u>Spouse choice</u> **				
Family	36.5	25.6	23.4	27.6
Woman with advice	53.3	60.6	62.4	59.4
Women without advice	10.2	13.8	14.2	13.0
<u>Relationship to husband</u> *				
Paternal cousin				
Maternal cousin	15.5	13.1	13.2	13.8
Other relative	17.6	14.4	13.1	14.7
Non-relative	7.9	7.5	5.6	6.9
	59.0	65.0	68.2	64.6
<u>Education</u> **				
None	84.8	70.4	51.8	67.2
Primary	13.3	22.0	34.6	24.5
Secondary or higher	1.9	7.6	13.6	8.3
<u>Relative level of education of spouses</u> **				
Both uneducated	58.5	40.4	25.1	39.3
Both same level	5.9	12.2	17.5	12.6
Husband higher	23.2	34.0	40.5	33.6
Wife higher	3.9	4.9	8.2	5.9
Partner's ed. unknown	8.6	8.5	8.7	8.6
<u>Worked before first marriage</u> *				
No				
Yes	40.0	43.6	46.3	43.7
	60.0	56.4	53.7	56.3
<u>Control of income earned before first marriage</u> (a)				
Family/Equally shared				
Self	38.5	32.3	35.9	35.3
	61.5	67.7	64.1	64.7
Number of women	676	963	982	2621

Source: Togo Demographic and Health Survey Individual Recode File

Notes:

Data pertain to all ever-married women

For each group of variables, column percentages add up to 100

\*\* Pearson chi-square significant at  $p < .001$ \* Pearson chi-square significant at  $p < .05$ 

(a) Restricted to women who worked before first marriage

Table 2. Patterns of first marriage in Togo by marriage cohort

Variable	Year of first marriage			
	Before 1970	1970-1979	1980-1988	All cohorts
<u>Age at first marriage</u> **				
Under 16	33.4	28.0	18.6	25.9
16-17	24.7	28.0	27.2	26.9
18-19	22.5	20.1	25.0	22.5
20 and older	19.4	23.9	29.2	24.7
<u>Husband of the same ethnic group</u> **				
No	17.5	24.3	24.8	22.7
Yes	82.5	75.7	75.2	77.3
<u>Always lived with Husband</u> **				
No				
Yes	9.8	17.5	19.1	16.1
	90.2	82.5	80.9	83.9
<u>Maximum number of wives in the union</u> **				
One	38.9	45.4	57.5	48.3
Two	36.7	34.2	31.3	33.7
Three or more	24.4	20.4	11.2	18.0
<u>Wife rank at the start of the union</u> ** (a)				
Senior	42.1	41.9	25.6	37.0
Second	40.8	38.7	54.6	44.1
Third or higher	17.1	19.4	19.8	18.8
Number of women	676	963	982	2621

Source: Togo Demographic and Health Survey Individual Recode File

Notes: Data pertain to all ever-married women  
 For each group of variables, column percentages add up to 100  
 \*\* Pearson chi-square significant at  $p < .001$   
 \* Pearson chi-square significant at  $p < .05$   
 (a) Restricted to women in polygynous first unions

Table 3. Women's status and nuptiality patterns in Togo

Variable	Percent of women				
	In consensual unions (b)	First marrying at age 20+ (c)	In inter-ethnic unions	Always lived with husband (b)	Entering monogamous unions
<u>Spouse choice</u>					
Family	17.8	17.0	13.6	92.8	35.5
Woman with advice	23.2	30.6	26.8	81.9	46.4
Women without advice	62.6	29.5	29.6	73.4	43.1
<u>Relationship to husband</u>					
Paternal cousin	29.3	25.5	11.0	85.2	41.1
Maternal cousin	24.9	24.3	14.0	82.0	44.2
Other relative	15.7	15.8	10.0	94.2	36.7
Non-relative	27.9	28.7	29.8	82.8	43.8
<u>Education</u>					
None	26.1	22.8	19.2	87.6	38.2
Primary	29.5	29.4	28.2	76.9	49.7
Secondary or higher	24.3	50.2	43.6	73.4	62.6
<u>Relative level of education of spouses</u>					
Both uneducated	25.7	20.7	16.4	90.9	31.6
Same level	28.0	36.3	31.0	89.5	59.3
Husband higher	27.6	28.7	26.4	80.1	49.9
Wife higher	23.1	28.8	28.1	84.6	46.4
Husband's ed. unknown	29.3	32.2	30.8	73.6	43.3
<u>Worked before first marriage</u>					
No	29.9	24.2	21.6	83.6	44.1
Yes	24.4	28.7	24.9	83.9	42.2
<u>Control of income earned before first marriage (a)</u>					
Family/Equally shared	26.7	24.3	21.5	84.7	39.6
Self	27.0	31.0	26.7	82.3	43.6
Total	26.8	26.7	23.5	83.8	43.0

Source: Togo Demographic and Health Survey Individual Recode File

Notes:

Data pertain to all ever-married women

(a) Restricted to women who worked before first marriage

(b) Standardized by duration of marriage

(c) Restricted to women aged 20 years and older

Table 4. Percentage Distribution and Means of variables included in the Cox Hazard Regression of the Impact of Women's Status on Divorce

Variable	Rural	Urban
<b>WOMEN'S STATUS INDICATORS</b>		
<u>Spouse choice</u>		
Family/Woman with family's advice	90.2	89.2
Woman without advice	9.8	10.8
<u>Relationship to husband</u>		
Relative	48.6	51.7
Non-relative	51.4	48.3
<u>Respondent's education</u>		
Uneducated	69.2	35.4
Educated:lower than husband	16.4	41.2
Educated:same or higher level than husband	12.8	17.3
Educated: Husband's level of education unknown	1.6	6.1
<u>Wage work before first marriage</u>		
No cash work	45.1	40.3
Income for family/equally shared	20.4	18.9
Income for self	34.5	40.8
<b>RESPONDENT'S CHARACTERISTICS</b>		
Age (mean)	30.8	30.8
<u>Ethnic group</u>		
Adja-Ewe	45.4	51.7
Kabje-Tem	20.7	21.7
Para-Gourrou	23.1	20.6
Other	10.8	6.0
<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF UNION FORMATION</b>		
<u>Age at first marriage</u>		
Under 20	79.8	54.6
20 years and over	20.2	45.4
Union order (mean)	1.27	1.28
<u>Type of Union</u>		
Consensual	27.6	25.1
Formal	72.4	74.9
<u>Husband from same ethnic group</u>		
No	16.7	39.6
Yes	83.3	60.4
<u>Always lived with husband</u>		
No	14.5	20.8
Yes	85.5	79.2
<u>Wife rank last union</u>		
Sole	40.2	49.6
Senior	20.6	16.0
Second or higher	39.2	34.4
Duration of the last union (mean)	11.2	9.7
Percentage currently divorced	3.1	7.2
Number of women	1844	777

Table 5. Results of the Cox Hazard Regression of the Impact of Women's Status on Divorce

Variable	Total	Rural	Urban
<b>WOMEN'S STATUS INDICATORS</b>			
<u>Spouse choice</u>			
Family/Woman with family's advice	---	---	---
Woman without advice	.864 ***	.666 **	.778 **
<u>Relationship to husband</u>			
Relative	---	---	---
Non-relative	.643 **	.535 *	.813 *
<u>Respondent's education</u>			
Uneducated	---	---	---
Educated:lower than husband	.793 ***	.641	.531
Educated:same or higher level than husband	.891 ***	.800 **	.696 *
Educated: Husband's level of education unknown	1.360 ***	1.135 *	1.310 ***
<u>Wage work before first marriage</u>			
No cash work	.474	.107	.921 *
Income for family/equally shared	---	---	---
Income for self	.321	.084	.711
<b>RESPONDENT'S CHARACTERISTICS</b>			
Age	-.013	-.007	-.018
<u>Ethnic group</u>			
Adja-Ewe	---	---	---
Kabje-Tem	.024	.265	.026
Para-Gourrou	.019	-.015	.186
Other	.870 ***	1.331 ***	.822
<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF UNION FORMATION</b>			
<u>Age at first marriage</u>			
Under 20	-.247	.084	-.386
20 years and over	---	---	---
Union order	.425 ***	.483 **	.458 *
<u>Type of Union</u>			
Consensual	1.274 ***	1.236 ***	1.483 ***
Formal	---	---	---
<u>Husband from same ethnic group</u>			
No	---	---	---
Yes	-.328	-.169	-.279
<u>Always lived with husband</u>			
No	---	---	---
Yes	-.369 *	-1.090 ***	.691 *
<u>Wife rank last union</u>			
Sole	-.193	-.515	.073
Senior	-.433	-.696 *	-.129
Second or higher	---	---	---
Number of women	2621	1844	777

Notes: Data pertain to the disruption of the last union  
 --- Omitted category  
 \*\*\* Significant at p<.01  
 \*\* Significant at p<.05  
 \* Significant at p<.10