

Female-Headed Poverty in Senegal: A Mixed Methods Study

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Quantitative studies of female-headed household (FHH) poverty in Senegal suggest that they are less poor, in contrast to the common perception that FHH in Africa are poorer. We undertook qualitative research in the field to find a far more nuanced picture. We find that the determination of “poor” or “non-poor” will differ depending on the definition of headship used in the data collection and analysis. For polygamous FHHs, quantitative approaches find them to be non-poor, while qualitative research finds them to be poor. The poverty status of FHHs has important implications for effective social and anti-poverty policy.

Keywords: Africa, poverty analysis, gender

INTRODUCTION

Senegal is unusual in that the poverty rate for female-headed households (FHHs) is lower than the poverty rate for male-headed households, according to official statistics and World Bank estimates (World Bank, 2015; Dang, Lanjouw and Swinkels, 2014). As a broad generalization, in many African countries, female headship is correlated with an increased risk of poverty. Although this is a popular point of view, Buvinić and Gupta (1997) found that only just over half of 61 studies analyzed found FHHs were more likely to be poor. Milazzo and van de Walle (2015) noted both that many observers stated that FHHs in Africa were more likely to be poor, but they themselves found the evidence to be mixed. We explore the complexities in our study. Societal notions of female inferiority are ingrained in Senegalese culture through religious Islamic influences and remnants of French colonialism (Latha, 2010). Only one in four female heads of household are educated (Kebe and Charbit, 2007). We explore the complexities of defining FHHs as poor or non-poor. We seek to answer the question: are FHHs in Senegal poor?

We decided to undertake a qualitative exploration of female headship and poverty in Senegal to explore more deeply this relationship. First, we define headship, households, and poverty. Second, we describe our study and present our findings. The next section of the paper details differences between the

quantitative and qualitative evidence. Finally, we draw conclusions and examine implications for anti-poverty and social policy.

DEFINITIONS OF HEADSHIP, HOUSEHOLDS, AND POVERTY

There is no universally recognized definition of household headship (Van de Walle and Milazzo, 2015). Usually, the head is identified as either the primary income earner or the household member that all other household members agree and verbalize is the head (Kebe and Charbit, 2007). Recent literature on intra-household inequality reveals that conducting poverty research on the household level can neglect significant experiences on the individual level (De Vreyer and Lambert, 2016). Such oversights are especially prevalent in Senegal, where many “households” often live in the same physical house, and where households often span multiple physical houses, such as is the case of polygamous households. We describe the official/World Bank definitions of households and heads and then present qualitative definitions from our own work and other qualitative researchers.

The World Bank Poverty Assessment (2015) and Dang, Lanjouw and Swinkels (2014) used quantitative data from the second 2010-2011 Enquête de Suivi de la Pauvreté au Sénégal (ESPS II) or in English, the second Senegal Poverty Monitoring Survey. The ESPS I and II were implemented by the Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie (ANSD) and financed by the World Bank, the Canadian International Development Agency, and the World Food Program (Dang, Lanjouw and Swinkels, 2014). The ESPS II was a nationally representative survey; thus its findings are statistically robust reflections of Senegal.

ESPS I and II used the standard World Bank approach to define household members and household head. To determine the household head, respondents were prompted by enumerators and interviewers to designate who was the household head. For household membership, enumerators and interviewers asked respondents to list all persons present or absent at the moment of the interview who “habitually lived and took their meals together,” starting with the household head. The definition of a household used by the World Bank and is as follows: a group of people that share meals together, live together, and recognize one person as the head. (We obtained this information at an interview with the World Bank Senegal office in March, 2019). The Poverty Assessment found the average household size in Senegal to be 9 (World Bank, 2015).

International organizations traditionally define the head of the household as either the person whom the respondents identified or the most significant financial contributor to this household. A woman can be a household head under the previous definition and also in a unique case if her husband is polygamous. The interviewers of the 2011 ESPS II marked a non-cohabitating wife as the head of her household if her polygamous husband was not living in the house on the day of the interview. The Poverty Assessment stated that, “among polygamous households, the husband is considered to be the head of the household in which he is living on the day of the survey; his other wives, if they live elsewhere, are considered to be the heads of those households.” (World Bank 2015, p .45).

Qualitative researchers use a different definition/approach. For example, we were not able to estimate an average household size from the qualitative data. Due to local superstition, we were told that it was inappropriate to count people in a family in Senegal. We asked participants to list with whom they lived but could not gather an exact number. We suspect that household size is flexible under a locally defined definition of household.

As reported by the participants in our study, Islamic law obligates men to provide separate houses for his wives and to spend equal time between establishments. Polygamous men who separate their wives, however, are those with the financial capability to fund multiple houses. Further, only 31 percent of polygamous men have non-cohabitating wives (De Vreyer and Lambert, 2016).

The traditional Western household structure usually includes only the nuclear family. In Senegal, many nuclear families live under the same roof. Therefore, many “households,” as defined by international organizations, can exist within a physical house. Research done by De Vreyer and Lambert (2016) corroborates our observation, finding, on average, that a Senegalese household is naturally self-

divided into three “cells,” or subunits of a head and his/her dependents. Our qualitative analysis found that the local definition of a Senegalese household includes polygamous men in the households (or “cells”) of all of his wives, even if they are non-cohabitating. Kebe and Charbit (2007) highlighted the complexity in defining a polygamous household for the purpose of poverty research, explaining that survey enumerators may double-count a single household by counting two wives of the same husband as two independent households.

A traditional Senegalese house will have many household heads residing in it. Each nuclear family identifies a head, typically the father of the dependent children. These household heads are then ranked in a hierarchy of headship. Age (seniority) and gender (male) determine the rank. Most frequently, this ranking holds regardless of the physical presence of the head in the house. For example, a woman will often identify her husband as the head of her and her children, even if he lives in a different house (perhaps, with another wife) or even abroad. Although, if the original head of the household is absent for extended periods of time, another head may be selected. Kebe and Charbit (2007) explored this topic, and concluded that, in the absence of her husband, a Senegalese woman will often fall under the headship of another male relative. Kebe and Charbit (2007) further explained the challenge faced by survey enumerators who often mistakenly record a household as female-headed, when in fact, the locally-defined head is only physically absent. We also found that the local concept of headship is understood as the chief of the family, “kilifé” in Wolof--the most widely used, indigenous language in Senegal.

The concept of a female head is almost entirely unrecognized in Senegalese society. In our focus groups, we asked participants to “define a female-headed household.” The immediate reaction we received included perplexed expressions that indicated the concept was foreign to the respondents. We then probed the respondents further, asking them to imagine a scenario in which no man exists in the family. Only after this probing would respondents answer that widows or another single woman in an exclusively female household may head a household.

We started each individual interview by asking participants to describe their household dynamics, including an explanation of why the participant identified the head as such. One of the monogamous male respondents explained that he was the head “because in Africa, if you’re married, then you’re the chief [household head]. It’s traditional.” A monogamous female participant identified her husband as the head of the household because “in Senegal, that is the role of a married man.”

The case of a female-headed polygamous household differs significantly between the qualitative and quantitative definitions. The World Bank Poverty Assessment defined polygamous household headship using the following method: “Among polygamous households, the husband is considered to be the head of the household in which he is living on the day of the survey; his other wives, if they live elsewhere, are considered to be the heads of those households” (World Bank, 2015, p. 45). Our polygamous female participants, however, almost unanimously recognized their husband as the head of their household, even if they do not live together. The Poverty Assessment considered such polygamous households as female-headed while our participants do not. Intuitively, in order to provide an independent house for each of his wives, the husband must have the financial means to do so. These men are not likely to be poor and neither are their respective households. Therefore, the quantitative analysts may include non-poor, male-headed households (as defined locally) in their calculation of polygamous female-headed households. Polygamous households with non-cohabitating wives comprise 31 percent of all polygamous households in Senegal (De Vreyer and Lambert, 2016).

Definitions of poverty also differ sharply between quantitative and qualitative studies. The Government of Senegal and the World Bank worked closely together to develop a consumption-based national poverty line per adult equivalent using the Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) approach. An international per capita poverty line of \$1.25 per day was also calculated. Details about the poverty line methodology were presented in the 2011 World Bank Poverty Assessment of Senegal (2015, pp. 37-39).

Thanks to the gracious cooperation of ANSD and the World Bank, we had the ESPS II consumption aggregate and created variables including the official poverty line dummy, which we used in our analysis. Therefore, we were able to replicate the findings of the Government and World Bank (World Bank 2015), which we reproduce below.

The official definition of poverty in Senegal is a quantitative one. It is based on what a household reported it consumed (purchased or ate out of its own production of food) divided by the number of equivalent household members (per equivalent) compared to a cost of basic needs poverty line. Readers may be more familiar with the World Bank's international quantitative poverty line, which is currently \$2 per person per day (a per capita measure), used for international comparisons.

Quantitative poverty lines have a long history (Rowntree, 1901) and were developed at the World Bank for developing countries (World Bank, 1990; Ravallion, Datt and van der Walle, 1991; World Bank 2000; Ravallion, 2016). Quantitative poverty lines have many supporters and detractors--too numerous to list here. Such a quantitative definition of poverty is very different from what we used in our qualitative work.

In our qualitative fieldwork, we avoided directly asking participants if they were poor. We found that Senegalese culture holds a taboo against self-identifying as "poor." To remain culturally sensitive, we measured poverty by asking, "are you having financial difficulties right now?" along with other proxies for community-based poverty measures. While this method allows for a more nuanced analysis of poverty, it is not directly comparable to consumption-based poverty measurements.

OUR STUDY & FINDINGS

We conducted our field research beginning May 26th to August 4th of 2019 in Senegal. In the study, we conducted 137 semi-structured individual interviews (79 female, 58 male) and 36 single-gender focus groups (23 female, 13 male), resulting in a total interview enrollment of 237 participants. The interviews were translated between Wolof, French, and English by a former masters' student in English at ----- [redacted for blind review]. We conducted the interviews in the following districts around Dakar: Thiaroye Sur Mer, Yarekh/Hann, Mermoz/Sacre-Coeur, Yoff/Camberene, Grand Yoff/Inland Dakar, HLM, Notto, downtown Dakar, Medina, and Ngor. Some participants indicated living in other regions of Senegal. We targeted our interview sites based on the Poverty Map provided by ANSD. We used three different questionnaires during the research: a Women's Questionnaire, a Men's Questionnaire, and a Focus Group Questionnaire (obtainable upon request to the first author). The women's and men's questionnaires asked about personal family structure, headship, income, and societal views. The focus group questionnaire complemented the individual ones and framed its questions toward general societal beliefs on headship, family structure, and gender. The combination of the three questionnaires offers a comprehensive insight of poverty and gender dynamics in Senegal.

The difference in methodology behind qualitative work and quantitative work produces different results. Both methods have limitations as well as benefits, which is why our qualitative work is meant to complement, rather than supplement, the quantitative findings. We find it essential to note the limitations we encountered with qualitative research. We worked to develop close relationships with our participants. Though a local translator accompanied us to every interview and focus group, we were visibly foreign and unofficial. This may have skewed responses and thus may account for differences between our findings and those of the ESPS II. As in all qualitative work, there is a possible influence of bias in both the questions asked and the interpretation of the responses. We worked with our university's Institutional Review Board and other faculty colleagues to mitigate this issue with bias training and training in qualitative survey design practice. Lastly, the language barrier we faced with the participants inevitably resulted in some information to be lost in translation. Despite these limitations, qualitative research has significant benefits over quantitative work. The lack of time constraint allowed us to develop a deeper relationship with each participant than what quantitative surveys allow. The flexibility of the questions allowed us to probe respondents to expand upon their initial answers. Our team's unofficial and personable approach allowed for respondents to feel comfortable answering truthfully. Often, respondents would invite us into their homes to share a meal following the interview.

In our qualitative approach, participants reported differences on the poverty experiences of female-headed households when disaggregated by marital status. Thus, we disaggregated female-headed households by marital status, including widowed, polygamous, monogamous, divorced, and single. We

cannot determine whether female-headed households are generally less impoverished when analyzing the qualitative data as many participants referred to female-headed households as hypotheticals as opposed to actual examples they have observed. Participants were more clearly able to express their thoughts and opinions on poverty when we separated FHHs by marital status.

Widows

Participants indicated that female-headed households led by widows are more impoverished. Becoming a widow induces a negative income shock (Lambert *et al*, 2017). Widows customarily remain in their homes during a four-month grieving period following their husband's death. This leaves the widow dependent on her family and community as she cannot leave the house to work.

Furthermore, many of the widows were reported to be too old to re-enter the workforce after their husband's death, again causing them to rely solely on familial support or the support of the community. These widows also report receiving very little financial support from the community, overall. Widows do not receive any government support unless her husband worked in a formal sector firm (Lambert *et al*, 2017). The main source of financial support comes from children. One recently widowed woman said, "I am facing challenges as the new chief [household head] because I have lost my source of consistent income, and I can't replace it." Further, widows tend to be excluded from the division of illiquid, inherited assets. (Lambert *et al*, 2017). The late husband mainly gives the inheritance to his sons (Lambert *et al*, 2017). The participants also noted that widows rarely remarry due to their older age, which results in a permanent loss of marital income. One female widowed participant said, "it is more difficult for widows to remarry because the children of the mother do not like to see her remarry after the death of their father." The analysis of widowed women shows that they are likely to experience poverty due to the decrease in familial income, which is unlikely to be replaced.

Divorcées

The financial status of divorced female-heads of households depends mainly on the ability or willingness of her family to support her after her divorce. One divorcée said, "divorced women are worse off financially. Also, divorced women have many financial problems as her family does not help her." This respondent expressed feeling fortunate for her mother's financial support following the divorce. Women do not automatically become the household head following their divorce. It is customary that divorced women fall back under the protection of their parents after a divorce, resulting in mixed responses as to whether they indicate themselves as head of that household or one of their parents. For example, one respondent said, "if a woman is divorced, she returns to her family, so she doesn't have financial problems anymore." Divorced women do not have significant financial difficulties if they have parents who are willing and able to support their daughter. These divorced women, supported by their parents, are more likely to indicate their father or mother as the head of their household, which would be excluded from our analysis of divorced female-heads of household.

The other group of divorced women, who were not supported by their parents after the divorce -- either due to her parent's financial difficulties or lack of willingness to support -- were overwhelmingly deemed to be experiencing financial difficulties daily. This group of divorced women were more likely to be indicated as heads of households by respondents. While we cannot perfectly separate these two subgroups of divorced women, our analysis indicates that divorced female heads of households were more likely to experience significant financial difficulties. Furthermore, participants did not indicate that either group (those receiving monetary assistance from her parents or those who are not) received any financial support from the community.

Single Women

Single women who identified themselves as heads of households were young women, under the age of 25, who may represent the perspective of a younger generation. These particular participants all received at least a university education, which is less common among women in Senegal. In one focus group interview with two young single females, there was a debate on whether a woman could be the

head of the household. One participant, who indicated her father as the head of her household, said “the head of the household is always a man,” to which the second participant, who indicated herself as the head of her own household, responded, “I do not agree. I am a feminist. Women can be the heads of their households.”

Our analysis does not determine the overall poverty of single women, as this subgroup of heads of household comprises 13.3% of our female heads of households. Therefore, we will not determine the poverty trends of this group. Additionally, our focus group participants rarely recognized these single women as even a possibility for being heads of households. Participants would not characterize these single women as heads of households, and thus do not offer statements regarding the poverty status of this subgroup. The self-identifying single FHHs are outliers compared to the vast number of female single participants who reported not being the head of the household since fathers are traditionally the head. As this group of single female-headed households is miniscule in size, the lack of ability to determine financial status should not affect our overall analysis of poverty of female-headed households.

Women in Monogamous Marriages

Monogamous female-headed households have a more fluid definition of headship and thus are more complex to analyze. While a monogamous woman might indicate herself as the head of her household today, such a determination may not be permanent. Fluidity of headship is mainly due to the traveling schedule of her husband. The participants indicated that when the husband is not traveling (thus living in the home), he would be considered the head of the household and would regain control over the decisions. One female head of household whose husband was in Italy said, “I control the money because my husband is gone, but when he is home, it is different. If my husband lives in the house, he would make the decisions because that is just Senegal.” Married men also weighed in on this issue saying, “in general, women are not the heads of households. If the husband lives abroad... , then the woman can be the head.”

Another time a monogamous woman may indicate herself as the head of the household is if she is employed while her husband is unemployed. In these instances, the woman may indicate herself as the head of the household; however, the community rarely recognizes a wife as the household head. Kebe and Charbit (2007) confirmed that a household can still be identified as male-headed, even if the primary income earner is female. Many of our participants expressed the common belief that men are “the heads of the household because in Senegal the husbands are the chief [household head].” Werwie *et al.* (2019) indicated that men do not like their wives having financial independence because it enables the wife to leave her husband. If a woman is married, the husband is the household head despite the incomes of the wife or the husband. In these circumstances, the woman works while the husband attempts to find employment. Women hesitate to label themselves as household head out of fear of disrespecting their husband. One participant said, “my husband is the head of the household because it’s traditional, and I’m a traditionalist. I’m not the head of the household because I’m married, and it’s the role in Senegalese culture, which I respect. I love my husband, and I respect him,” even though she indicated having to financially support him.

We conclude that monogamous women overall have financial difficulties as they often lack the financial support of their husbands who are not employed. Other participants who see wives working while their husbands are unemployed do not indicate these women as heads of households, so they do not offer any additional insight on the broader financial standing of these families.

Women in Polygamous Marriages

The strongest and most consistent finding of ours in regards to financial status is that polygamous households experience significant financial difficulties. There have been reports of negative income shocks to the family for every additional wife taken into the household (Boltz and Chort, 2019). The participants notably commented on the direct causality between polygamy and poverty. They often said “polygamy causes poverty because with more wives you have to spend more every day.” After entering into a polygamous marriage, the financial situation of the participants became more strained as bigger families incur higher expenses. Participants further indicated that poor men were more likely to enter into

polygamous marriages compared to wealthy men. One participant reported, “mainly the men that enter into polygamous marriages are poor. Not a lot of rich people enter polygamous marriages.” Polygamous families also commonly result in more children, increasing the overall costs of living.

Wives in polygamous households are unlikely to indicate themselves as heads of households. Even when the wives live in separate houses, the men claim to be heads of both households. One man who separates his wives and spends two days with each wife says, “I am the chief of both houses because I am the husband of both women.” In polygamous families, the husband is seen to be heading both households. Of all the polygamous participants interviewed, just under a quarter (21.74%) identified a female head.

In the rare cases that a woman with a polygamous husband indicated herself as the head, her husband was spending a substantial amount of time in other households. Some monogamous women indicated themselves as the head due to long absences from their husband while he works abroad. This logic applies similarly to polygamous female heads. If a wife deems her husband having had long periods of absences from her, then she may decide to indicate herself as head. The man in this case is spending time with his other wives in their households. However, many polygamous women in the same situation would still indicate their husband as the head due to tradition. The community also would still not recognize her as the head. Future researchers might choose to interview multiple people within the same household to determine if they indicate the same head. The women who indicate themselves as the head of a polygamous household comprise a small group within the polygamous subset.

Income Pooling

In most Western cultures, it is customary for husbands and wives to combine their money. In contrast, a traditional husband and wife in Senegal will not combine incomes. This pattern may be due to a combination of factors. The factor most relevant to this study is the division of money in polygamous marriages. If a husband decided to take a second wife, it would be inappropriate to use the money shared between him and his first wife to finance his second. Instead, men that intend to be polygamous in the future keep their money separate from their wife but provide her with finances to manage the household. The wife, if she has a form of income, also keeps that money separate from her husband. She uses this money to buy additional merchandise such as clothes for her or her children. Sow, Antonides and Niehof (2009) show a typical Senegalese couple will separate their money used for health, clothing, and teas/coffee. They usually pool expenses such as education and food (Sow, Antonides and Niehof, 2009). Families set financial priorities that dictate this method of pooling. As a result, the first priority is often food, of which both the husband and wife share the cost. The next priorities are health and clothing, which are categorized as luxuries, and are therefore paid for independently (Sow, Antonides and Niehof, 2009). We did not investigate this topic extensively.

Obligations

A tradition of obligations dictates the spending habits of most household members. The participants cited Islamic law or Senegalese culture (which are often intertwined) as the source of each obligation. Women are not obligated to work. The majority of participants indicated that they prefer a wife to have an income opposed to being a housewife, but it is not necessary for a wife to work. The wife does not have an obligation to provide financially to the family. The wife does have an obligation to raise and care for the children. The man’s main obligation is to financially provide for the family. Specifically, he is obligated to provide, “food, water, and electricity” to the household. The children also have financial obligations. Children, specifically sons, are obligated to send financial support to their parents as the parents begin to age. As retirement benefits are minimal in Senegal, most of the financial insurance of older citizens comes from their children (Lambert, 2016).

Gender and Poverty

There was no consensus among participants on who poverty affects more, men or women. The participants who argued that poverty is worse for men pointed to the financial obligation of the man to provide for his family, whereas the woman does not have that obligation. They also report that women

receive more help from the community. Those that believe it is worse for women explain that women are the primary caretakers of the children, often providing them clothing or food from their own pockets opposed to receiving funds from their husbands. Respondents also noted the difficulties women have in finding employment. Many participants also mentioned that poor women may resort to prostitution. Many women fear sexual violence if they must travel long distances to work. Other respondents simply answered that women and men experience poverty equally.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE

According to the ESPS II, 24% of households in Senegal in 2011 were female-headed. Milazzo and van de Walle (2015) found that for Sub-Saharan Africa, 26% of households were FHHs. The dominant form of all households was monogamous (47%), followed by 38% polygamous, 11% widows/widowers, 2% divorced, and 1.5% single heads (Table 1). In our qualitative data, of the females who indicated themselves as heads of households, 46.7% are widows, 13.3% polygamous, 10% monogamous, 16.7% divorce, and 13.3% single. We had a very different composition of FHHs than was found in the ESPS II, which is one source of difference.

TABLE 1
SENEGAL: HOUSEHOLD TYPES AND POVERTY

Marriage Type	Number Living In Household, by Gender of Household Head		Total (Population Basis)
	Male	Female	
Monogamous	5,719,520	747,495	6,467,015
Polygamous	4,188,769	1,042,054	5,230,823
Single Parent	178,884	27,700	206,584
Widow or Widower	196,497	1,283,827	1,480,324
Divorced	33,686	214,319	248,005
Sub/Total	10,317,356	3,315,395	13,632,751

Marriage Type	Breakdown of Household Type by Gender of Household Head		Total (Percent by Type)
	Male	Female	
Monogamous	88.44	11.56	100.00
Polygamous	80.08	19.92	100.00
Single Parent	86.59	13.41	100.00
Widow or Widower	13.27	86.73	100.00
Divorced	13.58	86.42	100.00

Marriage Type	Number Living In Household, by Poverty Status of Household		Total (Population Basis)
	Poor	Non-Poor	
Monogamous	3,018,658	3,448,357	6,467,015
Polygamous	2,620,053	2,610,770	5,230,823
Single Parent	74,901	131,683	206,584
Widow or Widower	574,204	906,120	1,480,324
Divorced	79,917	168,088	248,005
Sub/Total	10,317,356	3,315,395	13,632,751

Marriage Type	Breakdown of Household Type by Poverty Status of Type		Total (Percent by Type)
	Poor	Non-Poor	
Monogamous	46.68	53.32	100.00
Polygamous	50.09	49.91	100.00
Single Parent	36.26	63.74	100.00
Widow or Widower	38.79	61.21	100.00
Divorced	32.22	67.78	100.00
Sub/Total	46.71	53.29	100.00

Source: Author Calculations from ESPS II. Poverty Dummy from the World Bank.

The Government of Senegal with the World Bank found that overall female-headed households were less poor than male-headed households in 2011. Female-headed households were 35% poor while male-headed households were 51% poor, and overall, 47% of the population was poor (Table 2). Table 2 also presents poverty rates by gender and marital status. However, there are very few observations for some household types (especially female divorced (1.57 percent of the population lived in such households in 2011) or single female heads (0.2 percent of the population lived in such households in 2011)). We ran F-0-tests on each type of household to determine whether the poverty rate difference between male and female heads was significant at the 10% or lower level. We found that the difference in poverty between male and female heads was extremely significant ($p=0.00$) for both monogamous and polygamous households (which comprise the majority --81%--of households in Senegal). The gender difference was not statistically significant at the 10% level for widows/widowers, was just at that level for divorced heads, and was under 10% but not 5% for single heads. Female-headed households were also more likely to escape from poverty over the time period marked by ESPS I and ESPS II (Dang, Lanjouw and Swinkels, 2014).

TABLE 2
SENEGAL: HOUSEHOLD TYPES BY GENDER AND POVERTY STATUS

<u>Female-Headed Households</u>			
Marriage Type	(Number)		
	Poor	Non-Poor	Total
Monogamous	258,171	489,324	747,495
Polygamous	344,645	697,409	1,042,054
Single Parent	4,885	22,815	27,700
Widow	481,310	802,517	1,283,827
Total	1,149,520	2,165,875	3,315,395
(Percent)			
	Poor	Non-Poor	
Monogamous	34.54	65.46	100
Polygamous	33.07	66.93	100
Single Parent	17.64	82.36	100
Widow	37.49	62.51	100
Total	34.67	65.33	100
<u>Male-Headed Households</u>			
Marriage Type	(Number)		
	Poor	Non-Poor	Total
Monogamous	2,760,487	2,959,033	5,719,520
Polygamous	2,275,408	1,913,361	4,188,769
Single Parent	70,016	108,868	178,884
Widower	92,894	103,603	196,497
Divorced	19,408	14,278	33,686
Total	5,218,213	5,099,143	10,317,356
(Percent)			
	Poor	Non-Poor	
Monogamous	48.26	51.74	100
Polygamous	54.32	45.68	100
Single Parent	39.14	60.86	100
Widower	47.28	52.72	100
Divorced	57.61	42.39	100
Total	50.58	49.42	100

Source: Author Calculations from ESPS II. Poverty Dummy from the World Bank.

A second source of difference is sampling. The ESPS II sample was a random two-stage stratified sample using the population census as sampling frame, in which primary sampling units (PSUs) were randomly drawn from the census in the first stage, and then households were randomly selected from each PSU in the second stage. Thus, the ESPS II sample was nationally representative, and the dataset comes with weights that when applied result in findings representative of 13.6 million people--the size of the population in 2011. Our qualitative, purposeful sample is not representative. We had no sampling frame, and we make no claims that our sample is anything but indicative.

Third, our dataset population is remarkably younger than the household heads in the 2011 World Bank Poverty Assessment. We interviewed participants within the age ranges of 18 and 80 years old. The average age of our participants was 35.5 while the average age of a household head in the ESPS II was 51.5. Other organizations, when conducting interviews, seek to speak to the head of the household or person best informed about expenditures, which resulted in a higher average age. Differing average ages could result in contrasting responses, as younger generations may view the concept of FHHs differently than the older generations.

Another source of difference is that when we conducted our research, we used an interpreter and were clearly/visibly foreigners. This may have influenced respondents to tell us what they thought we wanted to hear. On the other hand, respondents might have been more forthcoming with us than with the official survey enumerators/interviewers. While official enumerators/interviewers were clearly Senegalese, they were also noticeably educated and official, and this may have also influenced respondents in how they replied in the ESPS I and II.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

More work on the question of poverty and headship is needed in Senegal. Ideally, a nationally representative survey with non-official-appearing interviewers would be conducted. This survey would include both a consumption module and a detailed qualitative interview to avail of both approaches (quantitative and qualitative).

There will always be some degree of subjectivity since Wolof is largely an unwritten language, and questionnaires in French would need to be interpreted. During a trip to Senegal in March 2019, we were told that only about a quarter or less of the population speaks French well enough to be interviewed in it, and this share is largely not the poor. Further, although Wolof is the majority language spoken by “more than 90%” of the population there are at least 40 local languages (see on-line resources in citations), and so it is likely that some respondents will not speak Wolof. In that case, a household member would likely have to interpret between Wolof and another local language, again raising the degree of subjectivity.

As Senegal urbanizes and its population ages, we can expect that there will be more female-headed households. Our research demonstrates the importance of separately analyzing female-headed households on the basis of their different marital statuses (monogamous, polygamous, single, widowed, divorced). We underscore the systematic differences between the definitions of household and headship between quantitative approaches and the cultural interpretation in Senegal. The difference in definition for polygamous female-headed households leads quantitative analysis to deem more of them to be non-poor while the qualitative approach shows more to be poor. Inconsistent labels of poor or non-poor for a household can have drastic effects on anti-poverty interventions. A holistic understanding of the household is necessary for effective social and anti-poverty policy.

Our work also raises caution against assuming that FHHs in Senegal are not at risk of poverty and therefore do not need special social programs or anti-poverty policy. We find that widows in particular are at risk of poverty and merit consideration for social/anti-poverty programming in terms of categorical targeting.

A categorical social benefit is one that is paid automatically to all beneficiaries in a given class, without an income test. The level of the benefit would depend on fiscal resources of the Government and reference some share of the poverty line. Like any benefit, a categorical benefit has errors of inclusion (whereby those that are not truly needy receive a payment) but typically does not have high errors of

exclusion (whereby those that are eligible do not receive the benefit). A categorical benefit can have some errors of exclusion when administrative capacity is weak and clerical errors deny beneficiaries access to benefits.

For Senegal in 2011, if all widows received a widow's benefit, we calculate based on the ESPS II that there would have been 1.3 million people living in such households, or 9.4 percent of the population. Unfortunately, this is a very large number of people to cover in a country with resources as restricted as those available to Senegal, so some further targeting mechanism would be necessary. Also, there were about 200,000 people living in widower households, which could raise concerns about equity. We also find a different picture for some women in polygamous marriages, which is a more nuanced situation than suggested in the quantitative approach. While some women in polygamous marriages are well-off, we find that many others are not. Divorced women also face a similar ambiguity—some fare well, others do not. However, unlike the case of widows, where a categorical approach would have limited errors of inclusion, other marital statuses are not so-clear cut. For these other types of FHHs, errors of inclusion would be too high for a categorical benefit. Also, a categorical benefit would be unaffordable for all but divorced women, and the government would not wish to be perceived as giving an incentive for divorce.

To sum up, we undertook a qualitative exploration of female headship and poverty in Senegal. We defined households, headship, and poverty in our qualitative work and contrasted those definitions with quantitative ones. We described our study and presented our findings. We detailed differences between the quantitative and qualitative approaches. We concluded by calling for more research and for consideration of a categorical benefit for widows in Senegal.

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