



## Working Women: A Research on Women in Cameroon<sup>a</sup>

### Yazar(lar) / Author(s)

Doktora Öğrencisi, Roukaya Merife Njoya   
Selçuk Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi,  
Sosyoloji Bölümü, Konya-Türkiye.

e-posta: [roukayanjoya5@yahoo.fr](mailto:roukayanjoya5@yahoo.fr).

Doç. Dr. Özlem Altunsu Sönmez 

Selçuk Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi,  
Sosyoloji Bölümü, Konya-Türkiye.

e-posta: [ozlemaltunsu@gmail.com](mailto:ozlemaltunsu@gmail.com).

(Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponding author)

### Makale Bilgileri/Article Information

Tür-Type: Araştırma makalesi-Research article

Geliş tarihi-Date of submission: 26. 09. 2024

Kabul tarihi-Date of acceptance: 07. 11. 2024

Yayın tarihi-Date of publication: 30. 11. 2024

### Hakemlik-Review

Hakem sayısı-Reviewers: İki Dış Hakem-Two  
External

Değerlendirme-Rewiev: Çift Taraflı Kör

Hakemlik-Double-blind

### Etik/Ethics

Etik beyan- Ethical statement: Bu çalışmanın  
hazırlanma sürecinde etik ilkelere uyulmuştur.

Benzerlik taraması- Plagiarism checks

Yapıldı-İntihal.net-Yes-İntihal.net

Etik bildirim- Complaints

[ictimaiyatdergi@gmail.com](mailto:ictimaiyatdergi@gmail.com)

### Çıkar çatışması-Conflict of interest

Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.

The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no  
conflict of interest

### Finansman-Grant Support

Herhangi bir fon, hibe veya başka bir destek  
alınmamıştır.

No funds, grants, or other support was  
received.

### Lisans- License

#### CC BY-NC 4.0

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/deed.tr>

### Atıf- Citation (APA)

Altunsu Sönmez, Ö.- Njoya, R. M. (2024). Working women: A research on women in cameroon. *İçtimaiyat*, 8(2), ss. 713-728. DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.33709/ictimaiyat.1556274>

### Abstract

Contemporary societies have undergone major changes in the last decades, particularly with the increase of women's participation in the workforce. Changes in family roles are also affecting the place of Cameroonian women in society. The aim of this study is to reveal the current Cameroonian family structure, then the new roles expected from working women, and finally men and society's perception of women. While using a qualitative research method, the data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The sample of the study consists of ten (10) adult Cameroonian women and ten (10) adult men between the ages of twenty (20) and sixty five (65). The diversity and contradiction between the current social orientations of Cameroonian men and women, especially the problems of working women, structural changes in families, and their immediate consequences were revealed. Men argue that their women copy white feminism, which is not suitable for their black African context and daily struggles, and their children consequently inherit those new habits. Women on the other side, complain that men became too irresponsible and do not fully provide nor take their responsibilities as it used to be with previous generations.

**Keywords:** Women, Working Women, Family Structural Modification, Family, Gender

### Çalışan Kadınlar: Kamerun'daki Kadınlar Üzerine Bir Araştırma

#### Öz

Çağdaş toplumlar son on yıllarda, özellikle kadınların işgücüne katılımının artmasıyla birlikte büyük değişikliklere uğradı. Aile rollerindeki değişiklikler Kamerunlu kadınların toplumdaki yerini de etkilemektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı Kamerun'daki mevcut aile yapısını, ardından çalışan kadınlardan beklenen yeni rolleri, son olarak da erkeklerin ve toplumun kadın algısını ortaya koymaktır. Nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılarak veriler yüz yüze yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini yirmi (20) ile altmış beş (65) yaşları arasındaki on (10) yetişkin Kamerunlu kadın ve on (10) yetişkin erkek oluşturmaktadır. Çalışma sonucunda; Kamerunlu erkek ve kadınların mevcut sosyal yönelimleri arasındaki çeşitlilik ve çelişki, özellikle çalışan kadınların sorunları, ailelerdeki yapısal değişiklikler ve bunların acil sonuçları olduğu ortaya çıktı. Erkekler, kadınlarının, siyahi Afrika bağlamlarına ve günlük mücadelelerine uygun olmayan beyaz feminizmi kopyaladığını ve dolayısıyla çocuklarının da bu yeni alışkanlıkları miras aldığını ileri sürmüşlerdir. Kadınlar ise erkeklerin çok sorumsuz hale geldiklerinden, önceki kuşaklarda olduğu gibi sorumluluklarını tam olarak yerine getiremediklerinden ve sorumluluklarını alamadıklarından şikayetçi olmuşlardır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kadınlar, Çalışan Kadınlar, Aile Yapısı Değişikliği, Aile, Toplumsal Cinsiyet.

<sup>a</sup> Bu çalışma Selçuk Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü'nde Roukaya Merife Njoya'nın, Doç. Dr. Özlem Altunsu Sönmez danışmanlığında yürütülen doktora tez çalışmasından üretilmiştir

## **1. Introduction**

With the increase in industrialization in many countries, and the modernization of institutions, way of life, education system and other branches of the society have all contributed in political, technological, cultural and socioeconomic major changes with the help of important tools such as television, internet, social media, and different infrastructural developments in many parts of Africa. All these factors were spread through the name of globalization which renders popular cultures in western societies accessible to the rest of the world (Odetola et al., 1983, p. 37). Therefore, important changes witnessed at all levels in the African societies are now reflecting on African families, resulting in the alteration of Men and women's traditional roles inside the family. Many researchers argued that, women's role is the most evolving role in families, going from the children's primary educators to the role of passive child raiser at times; from their traditional duties of house workers to outdoor professional activities that allow women to change their status inside society and in the family, but which also prevent most of them to take good care of children, one of the sources of conflict with men. These changes are associated to the increase of educated women and feminist movements for example which emphasizes women's freedom (Ogundare, 2010, p. 448). Thus, there are some observed factors as stated by many researchers, such as the level of education, the increasing percentage of educated women, religious belief, religious pressure, the observed differences in privilege between men and women, economic or financial limitations, difference in the attribution of social role and responsibilities which leads to an unbalanced repartition of power between genders, and also the evolution of family and social roles coming with globalization, the feminist's view of gender role evolution, that are usually cited as the main factors of family changes varying from one country to another. Therefore, these factors above have had an influence on the noted changes in family structures and gender roles. As a result, there is an increase in family formations that are not necessarily associated with a nuclear family, which include single parent female-headed families, skipped-generational families and child-headed families and the growth of step-families (Makiwane et al., 2017).

Beside the family structure that has witnessed major modifications with time, the aim of this work is to focus not only on displaying those family structural changes, but mostly on the new roles expected from women, especially the working women. Men and societal views on working women will also be discussed in the course of this research.

## **2. Cameroonian Families' Structural Evolution**

It should be precised here that, in Cameroon there are some tribes where men are by essence monogamous, that is, they do not married more than one woman, and this is practiced in those tribes since the ancestors' time. This is the case in some tribes in the Littoral, North-west and south-west regions where most of the couples practise monogamy. On the other side, there are tribes where men are by essence polygamous from their ancestors until today. Thus, in western part of Cameroon for instance polymamy at 55% is chosen and practised almost at the same level as monogamy with 45% (Bucrep Cameroon, 2023 p.46) Therefore, today young couples in particular, whatever their tribe and religion, freely decide on how they want to live their marriage. Thus, we can notice that, some muslims can be monogamous, some christians too can be polygamous; some couples may share all their wealth of before and after mariage, others may not. Thus, for many years, we have had different types of traditional family types in Cameroon. The first one is The Nuclear or Monogamous Family Type. The nuclear family is

the typical traditional type of family . This family type consists of two parents and a child or minimum four to ten (4-10) children. The nuclear family was long held in esteem in some societies as being the ideal in which to raise children, even in Cameroon this type of family was widely spread and seen as the ideal family image which still persists until today in people's mind. The other is The Extended or Polygamous Family Type. In Cameroon, as polygamy is legal according to the law, men are free to take as many wives as they want. In polygamous families, there is a man or father with one or more wives, and generally many children (minimum 25 up to more than 100). As it is commonly organized in most of the Cameroonian polygamous families, wives take turns cooking for the entire family. The husband generally spends the night with the wife who cooked for him and for the entire family as well. The man as the head of the family is responsible of the financial provision for the entire family, with activities such as hunting, farm works for those living in rural areas, and any other lucrative activity for those living in metropolises. Women can contribute by growing food for the family on family farm and selling some. While mothers are primarily responsible for children's care and education from a young age, and also for the household, fathers play a more prominent role in their children's lives as they grow older. They particularly provide future financial input for their sons' careers, marriages, and property decisions. For these reasons, the men were the pillars on which the whole family leaned. In Cameroon, most of the polygamous families are also seen as extended families which usually includes many relatives like the uncles, cousins, aunts, grandparents sometimes, living together and doing the different family related tasks together, helping in raising the children, the farm works - for those living in rural areas- and the houseworks. This type of family structure is generally formed due to some members' financial difficulties or because older relatives are unable to care for themselves alone.

### **2.1. Current Trends in Family Structure in Cameroon**

Nowadays, the nuclear family still remains widely spread. However, rarely, uncles, aunts, cousins are counted or mentioned as members of the close family when asked to Cameroonians. If the cliché obviously has a hard life, social reality shows a very different landscape: in twenty years, the model of the traditional nuclear family, even if it remains dominant in the minds, has clearly declined and is progressively replaced by other family models. It has given way to more diverse forms of marital relationships such as: married couples (monogamous and/or polygamous marriage types which still continues), cohabiting couples, companionship which is more and more common today, stepfamilies, single-parent and so on.

#### **2.1.1. Concubinage/companionship types, commonly called in Cameroon 'come we stay'**

This type of relationship is practice by more than 35% of the Cameroonian couples (Cameroon National Civil Status Office (BUNEC), 2018, p.20). It should be noted that this practice was quite rare because the traditional marriage was the base of all marital relationships. Today, more and more young people choose to live in this kind of relationship notwithstanding their religion and culture, before any legal marriage later in their relationships. Some couples spend countless years of their lives without any legal marital ties, and the consequences are sometimes seen after the death of one of the partner, especially the father, who leaves a woman and children who do not have any legal right on or any access to his properties according to the law.

### **2.1.2. Step Families**

Nowadays, almost 30% of all mariages (and this statistics are increasing) end in divorce in Cameroon (Camer.be, 2023, para. 4), and the observations show that, young couples are more concerned by separation or early divorce. Therefore, many of these new single mums or dads with one or more children often choose to get remarried. This creates the step or blended family which involves two separate families merging into one new unit.

### **2.1.3. Mono-Parental or Single-Parent Family type**

The single parent family consists of one parent raising one or more children on her/his own. This family may include a single mother with her child or children, a single dad with his child or children. The single parenthood family is the biggest change society has seen in terms of the changes in family structures according to social sciences experts.

### **2.1.4. Childless Family**

While most people think of family as a set of people, including children, there are couples who either cannot or choose not to have children. The childless family is sometimes the "forgotten family," as it does not meet the traditional standards set by society. Childless families consist of two partners living and working together. Many childless families take the responsibility of pet ownership or have extensive contact with their nieces and nephews.

## **2.2. Cameroonian Women's Expected Roles**

Cameroonian women since two decades now have undergone noticable changes at different levels. Eventhough there are not many available researches done specifically on this topic, we have nonetheless analyzed the topic with our target population. With some African researches as main sources, we have been able to support our study concerning the new Cameroonian women, working women, family changes, among other topics. This constitutes one of the main relevance of this research.

However, it took a long time to Cameroonian men to realize that, their women can no longer be treated as second zone citizens, despite the obtacles of a colonial past. As a matter of fact, light was shed on African women and Cameroonian ones consequently, after (Boserup, 1983)'s study, galvanizing African academician women's impressive works on their countries economical developments; those women's works were largely ignored in the scientific milieu, compared to males' works, which marked the beginning of a new era for African women (Azevedo, 1986). Thus, most of the women in Cameroon used to be house wives, even those who went to school ended up taking care of the house and family from their homes. Therefore, women in rural areas were generally more into agricultural works, trading and livestock activities. They generally had up to 6 or 8 children per women. Children were also seen as a family's biggest wealth; the more children you have, the more you were wealthy and respected as a man in the society. Children were also necessary to take care of their parents when they get older. On the other hand, women living in the Urban areas used to stay at home with generally 4 to 9 children per woman, counting on their husbands to bring back goods and money for their needs. Children generally help in the house works as instructed by parents. In this setting, they were only expected to help in house works and achieve great academic performances, in order to guarantee for themself a better future with good jobs.

Now a days, Cameroonian women since two decades, have undergone noticeable changes at different levels. Thus, at the financial level, it is more and more rare to find Cameroonian women especially the young ones, who are still house wives. Most of them have decided to start gaining more financial autonomy, in order to gain some independence from men. Thus, many Cameroonian mothers nowadays are business women, tailors, farmers and traders for those in rural areas. They own very small enterprises, selling basic necessities foods and products to help taking care of themselves and their children. Therefore, the increasing participation of women in the process of personal and family development helps to foster a more equitable distribution of individual and collective power through increased cash income and allow them to have the right some times on decision-making in families (Nkwi, 1987, p. 16).

At the level of education, women are now more likely to start and continue their studies until higher levels as PhD; thing that was very rare before due to the role assigned to them by the society. Given the fact that many women find it unfair to lose their husband's properties after their death, due to some administrative procedures, or the fact of becoming widow early (according to recent statistics, men die much earlier than women in Cameroon: 52.4 years old life expectancy; (Cameroon National Institute of Statistics, 2021. p.6) without any source of income to take care of their children, or being alone to struggle for their children and for themselves in order to survive, these women decide first of all to push their daughters to go as far as possible with their studies, with the hope of having later a good career, which is a door to better life standard. In universities, the number of women who continue their study until Bachelor degree is higher than the number of men (Cameroon Institute of Statistics 2023, p.7). Men in Cameroon for most of them, usually prefer to start looking for jobs to take care of their family, instead of doing long university studies. So, it is becoming more common today to see women in urban areas competing with men at all level of the society as politicians, teachers, engineer, doctors, army, minister, etc...

### **2.3. Men and Society's Perception of Working Women**

Eventhough contributing intellectually and financially in their families is a pride for many women today, knowing that this was not their primary role until a new past, this change has however been followed by noticeable consequences in families in particular and in the society in large. One of the consequences is seen on today's children education quality, which is a woman's primary role in a family. The family's normal order changes or is quite different with a mother who works because she can not fully give her time and energy to handle the house duties (preparing healthy food, raising good and respectful children) and children's education at the same time. Many recent social researches have even associated the increase of new illnesses and infant obesity to the fact that mothers are now working out and do not have time to select and cook healthy food for their families, which consequently make them fall on fast food, frozen and processed foods.

At the level of ideology, Cameroonian women today, fortunately or unfortunately, could not escape the liberalist and feminist ideologies as well as the way of life brought to them through globalization, and the westernized model of the society. Thus, today, we witness acculturation at its top level in Cameroon, in the society which is already in majority assimilated to French and English culture, religion, administration and way of life. So, it is common today to see Cameroonian women claiming more freedom and gender equity. They claim more laws to protect them against any inequality or illegality. They also want to be free to dispose of their

bodies as they wish, without having to think of what the parents or husbands will think of them. Moreover, more and more Cameroonian women today want to have the right to speak and take decisions in their couples, the right to handle private and public affairs as men. They also want to be free to decide when to get married or when to have children or not, without any judgement from society.

Therefore, one of the most discussed topic for researchers in Cameroon is the sexual liberty and liberation of men but also of women today, which is more surprising because in that society, women are supposed to be precious, modest, not exposed to the public eyes, etc... However, today it has become quite normal for young women and men to become sexually active by the age of fifteen (15), sometimes earlier, especially in urban areas. Young people tend to seek freedom in their way of life. It becomes more and more difficult to control young girls and boys; Moreover, the fact that girls now want to get married much later than that the age of eighteen (18) compared to the past, forgetting thus the honorable aspect of getting married as virgin. Married or not, women have children as early or as late as they want and one of the main culprits of this situation are parents according to many researchers such as (Sidze & Defo, 2013, p. 8). Today, more and more women do no longer see marriage and the protection that comes with it through the man, as a vital aspect of their lives, as it used to be the case before, given that they are now admitted to do almost all the works that were only reserved to men in the past.

The gradual evolution of women at the levels of education, finance, way of life, ideologies, etc... also comes with observable modifications in the way they perceive marital relations, their way of perceiving men today, the way they live their marital and social lives; the way men also perceive women has changed too. In Cameroon today, the number of polygamous unions is decreasing because most of the women, especially the educated ones, have the choice, so they decide generally not to be in polygamous families for diverse reasons (Oppong et al., 2019, p. 947).

It should be noted that, in the Cameroonian society today, 23.5% of women are single mums (Cameroon National Institute of Statistics, 2021, P.6), a quite alarming and increasing number, with men who have either abandoned the woman, died or divorced. Single parent men have the advantage that they can remarried even if they have many children from a previous relation. Researchers put this fault on the parents' lack of responsibility on their children's upbringing nowadays. There is no longer a strict supervision or control of children, even on female children as it used to be in the past, and one of the main consequences of this kind of behavior is the high number of girls who are mothers out of marriage, some by the age of fifteen (15) (Sidze & Defo, 2013, pp. 3-4).

From the previous analyses, we have remarked considerable changes on the side of women, while there was no big changes on the men side. It seems that, women are the ones conducting the train of social changes and evolution in the Cameroonian society.

Thus, women's evolution together with other factors, is generally raised up in that society as one of the cause of recurrent divorce cases especially in young couples where generally, men are facing a new evolved type of women totally different from what they are used to through their mothers, when they –the men- have not really evolved with time. Children's evolution in families are also assigned to women notwithstanding their status.

### **3. Methods**

This research is a Qualitative Research using a Case Study design. Qualitative researches generally focus on flexible questions rather than pre-defined ones, and they aim to find out or develop new opinions rather than imposing preconceived ones on the target population (Horowitz & Gerson, 2002, p. 268). Besides, very little or not much research has been done on this population with this topic; and when literary sources are limited, using qualitative method with an interpretative phenomenological approach to analyze the topic on a particular population might seem more appropriate (Demir & Roukaya, 2018, pp. 64-65). a phenomenological approach allows the researcher on the field to have a clear view on how the participants live, experience and display the phenomenon under study with them and then search the meaning of that experience for the participants (John W. Creswell, 1998, pp. 57-58).

For this research, a face to face Semi-structured Interview has been used preferably as the most appropriate method of data collection for this study. The researcher will design a list of questions that will guide the interview, but the interviewees will also have the right to answer freely to the different questions without specific boundaries (Bryman, 2003, p. 321).

Data Analysis step of the work should necessarily be done systematically by first of all, identifying the phenomenon to be explained and then, identify the factors that may contribute to its explanation and the categorization. Thus, the interactions with the participants during the interview will be used here to clarify and support the emerging set of categories. Meaning that, all the information collected on the field will be classified into themes and sub themes, together with the participants' demographic data, and all these will helped in the data coding. Each participant recorded will then be assigned a code using a specific coding method of identification.

To conduct this study, the researcher has used a purposive sampling selection method to find out all the participants. Thus, we will work with a total of twenty (N=20) Cameroonian men and women all leaving in Cameroon but in different cities of the country. Thus, the target population will be made up of ten (10) adult women and ten (10) adult men aged from twenty (21) to sixty (65) years old. These participants have been purposely selected for this work because they allow the researcher to have different shapes, various experiences and outcomes from the same topic or phenomenon but from people who have experienced the same issues differently (John W. Creswell, 1998, p. 58). So, the participants will have different marital statuses (polygamous and monogamous) as allowed by the Cameroonian law.

### **4. Findings And Discussions**

It is important to mention that, the research will be divided into sub themes related to the diverse replies collected from the interviews and related to the aim of this study. The different participants, both men and women, will be referred to as P1, P2 and so on.

**Table 1:** Detailed personal information on participants

Gender	Age	Marital Status	Academic Level	Number Of Children	Work Situation	Social Status
<b>P1 Female</b>	56	Widow	High school	7	Business woman	Middle class
<b>P2 Female</b>	43	Married	Master	1	Employee	Middle class
<b>P3 Female</b>	26	Married	Master	1	Employee	Middle class
<b>P4 Female</b>	39	Married	Master	5	Employee	Middle class
<b>P5 Female</b>	33	Married	Bachelor	4	Employee	Middle class
<b>P6 Female</b>	24	Married	Bachelor	1	Jobless	Middle class
<b>P7 Female</b>	27	Single	Master	0	Employee	Middle class
<b>P8 Female</b>	29	Married	Master	3	Employee	High class
<b>P9 Female</b>	33	Married	Master	4	Business woman	Middle class
<b>P10 Female</b>	60	Married	High school	10	Small Business	Low class
<b>P11 Male</b>	31	Married	Bachelor	1	Business man	Middle class
<b>P12 Male</b>	20s	Single	Bachelor	0	Employee	Middle class
<b>P13 Male</b>	30s	Single	Bachelor	0	Employee	High class
<b>P14 Male</b>	30s	Single	PhD	0	Employee	High class
<b>P15 Male</b>	30s	Single	Master	0	jobless	Middle class
<b>P16 Male</b>	36	Married	Master	3	Employee	High class
<b>P17 Male</b>	40s	Married	Master	5	Business man	High class
<b>P18 Male</b>	40s	Married	Master	7	Employee	Middle class
<b>P19 Male</b>	30s	Single	PhD	1	Employee	Middle class
<b>P20 Male</b>	34	Married	Master	3	Business man	High class

#### 4.1. A Woman's First Husband is her Job

As it is known, Cameroon is evolving as well as many countries around the world in this 21<sup>st</sup> century; many social aspects are changing. Thus, today, the presence of women is particularly remarkable in public places, which is normally men's areas. Some of them are oriented towards informal works, agriculture, and other jobs providing them a daily, weekly or monthly salary that helps those women towards the achievement of their financial autonomy. So, Cameroonian women are now included in number in the academic milieu and universities at the best places, in public and private companies also at the top ranks. Even in the government, women progressively take more places as decisions makers under the role of ministers, deputies and so on. However, this state of things is not well seen by all the Cameroonian men who feel their masculinity and their authority threatened, and even by some women who still prefer women to stay in their traditional role, or a status quo position for women. Therefore, some Cameroonians tend to justify the various changes observed inside families by the fact that women who are mothers, work many hours out of the house, and consequently cannot take care of the children, their husbands and the house works properly by themselves. On the other hand, many elderly and young mothers or women think that, today, a woman's first husband is her job, arguing that, even in difficult time of conflict or separation with the husband, it is always better for a woman, especially those who have children, to have a backup, a source of income which will help her to take care of herself and her children. This argument was defended by all our female participants even though some of them were still jobless.

#### 4.2. Today, Cameroonian Young men are too irresponsible!

Concerning the fact that women woke up and want to work more than before, many female participants during the interviews justified this state of things by stating that, it is because men, who are husbands, do no longer take full responsibility of their roles as men and they leave or



transfer many of their responsibilities to women. When we know that, today, taking care of a household, of children and of oneself requires a lot of money, it becomes unavoidable for women to take professional trainings to find a job later, to support the husband in his original role.

This opinion was well developed by most of our female participants such as P2, P5, P7 and P10 (all are young working women, married for some of them) who all think that, men today are too lazy, and they do not want to take their family fully in charge as it normally should be. They further defended that, those who fully assume their responsibilities are very few, and even when they do, after some time they start complaining of the overload of charges on their shoulders. We can notice that, three on the four female participants who stated this opinion are in or come from polygamous families. This is to say that, many among the Cameroonian men, particularly those in polygamous families, do not take full responsibility of their wives and children. This oblige their wives to find a job, in order to take care of themselves and their children. One of them said:

“I was obliged to start working in a different city, to have an extra money because my husband do not provide enough for me and my children. Moreover, he has other children with my co-wife so, his salary is not enough for all of us in our polygamous family. I truly would have preferred to stay at home, practicing my religion (she is Muslim), educating my children and spending memorable moments with them to reinforce our mother-children relationship, but it is not possible, unfortunately. If I stay at home, my children will lack a lot of basic things, and I cannot allow that to happen”... (P5, working married woman).

Almost the same words were uttered by P2 and P10 who live exactly the same dilemma in their marriages, and P7 describes almost the same situation from her mother's experience, knowing that, at the time of the interview she was not yet married. This situation is very difficult for some women who are already mothers because their husband's economic situation or their husbands attitudes towards all the charges in the family may not allow those women to have the choice to work or to stay at home when they want. They feel an obligation to work and this is a challenging decision for them to make. Hence it can be noticed that, Cameroonian women in marriages do not decide to work for their own personal satisfaction, but to assist their husbands in their primary role as providers; working for those women becomes a mere obligation.

### **4.3. Men Now Prefer Modern Working Women to House Wives**

The motivation of Cameroonian women to be more and more outside searching for jobs, clearly has various justifications and this could be perceived from the participants' point of focus during the interview. Thus, the female participants mentioned men's choice in terms of the quality of wives they want today, which seems to lead many women to try to attract men's attention or to build an image of independent and working women, but secretly actually hoping to impress the male gender and to increase their chance of being wooed or married.

So, concerning this affirmation on men's choice of women, taken from most of, not to say all of our female participants, who unanimously think that men prefer working women, almost all our male participants rather stated that, they would be fine if their wife does not work, in case she chooses not to. However, as soon as she decides to work, some of them would rather prefer that the wife contributes in some minor charges (water or electricity bills on her choice) not for the purpose of supporting their husbands in their roles but for the women in question to feel useful in the house. This for the men will not be an obligation in their family life. The previously

cited opinion was repeated and defended by almost all our male participants, except the participant P20 (an intellectual married working man) who prefers a complete autonomy of his wife or wives when he says that:

“Even though I can take everything in charge in my household, I prefer that my wife takes the habit of contributing in the house expenses. Very soon I will marry a second wife and she will need to take care of many things without waiting for me. I had contributed in her education so that she can later work and support me”... (P20, 34 years old, educated business owner).

Thus, from the previous analysis, it comes out that, the female participants strongly think that if they work more and earn their own money, they will be noticed by men or potential partners or husbands who tend now to prefer women who have a job to those who do not have. However, this argument was proved wrong by almost of our male participants. This is not what men really think when these later are making their choice of wife.

On the other hand, Cameroonian women seem to be more satisfied to play the role of the second bread providers in the family, while men think that, they can still continue to take in charge all the family expenses alone depending on the family's financial case at that time. It should also be mentioned that, for most of the male participants, women today are wrongly advised by their friends, mothers, coaches on social media, and so on, and it pushes them to adopt wrong behaviors and attitudes towards their family and husbands. This was clearly explained by P11, P12 and P15 who further said that, those wrong advises are surely based on negative experiences of few women.

“Women today follow their female friends, coaches that they find on social media, and some ‘wounded mothers’ who had the bad luck of having bad husbands or partners who did not treated them correctly in their marriages. So, they think that all men are the same. Today women want to work to compete with men in the house. Others are influenced by celebrities on social media who call themselves ‘financially independent and strong women’ and all those wrong advises make women to distance themselves from our traditional couple values”... (P11, P12).

Thus, the issue of working women need a serious focus because it causes a lot of conflicts and frustrations in couples and families with children. Today, a child's misbehavior, delinquency and other failures are attributed to the fact that his mother is working and does not have time to educate him or her. For many Cameroonian men and elderly parents, young women who are newly parents should stay at home to play their primary role of educating children at least until a certain age. But the question we ask is to know if children from families where the mother is house wife are better educated than the ones where the mother is working.

#### **4.4. Nowadays, Women Love Money Too much!**

This statement was pronounced by half of our male participants while discussing on the real reasons why women are so attached to their financial autonomy nowadays. Following up along that line, participants P11, P12, P15, P18 and P19 stated that, women are rather attached to money than to the pretended financial autonomy that they are saying to work for. They later said that, Cameroonian women for most of them, are not primarily working to support their husband. They all repeated that, when a women helps a man in his charges many times, she soon becomes annoyed and some of them can even start disrespecting the man of the house because of that contribution. This is the reason why, all the previously cited participants further

mentioned that, it is always better for a man to take full responsibility of his household expenses, to avoid conflicts. Moreover, one of the participants went further and took an example in his couple by saying that:

“If women were patient and supportive to their husbands under challenging times, many couples would not have major problems; and many mothers would be spending most of their time inside, at home, taking care of their children and household. (...) If women were not greedy and eager to have the most beautiful and most expensive articles when wanting a standard of life higher than their real standard, not seeking any useless competition with their sisters, in-law, and friends, many couples would be peaceful and happy actually”... (P18, a middle class employee in his 40s).

This is to say that, for men, the problem seem to be women’s perception of fulfillment and satisfaction in their way of life which is different from the men’s own; hence the clash of opinion and conflicts. It is known that, women generally prefer men who can provide them a minimum of security in terms of finance for themselves and their future children, a physical and moral security, among other important factors that intervene in conscious or unconscious female selection.

This part of the analysis, as the previous one, also brings up the diversity and contradiction that exists between men and women’s opinions and vision of life, concerning the same situation. Another point that comes out consequently from the fact that many women are working more and more outside is that, some roles have started to be mixed up together between husband and wife. Now, this can be seen as an advantage or an inconvenient, depending on each couples vision (traditional or modern).

#### **4.5. Many ‘New’ Cameroonian Women Follow their Mother’s Advice of Avoiding the Appellation ‘consumer’ by their future husband!**

This statement is one of the most recurrent one that came from the female participants. It seems to be the base or the starting point of the changes noticed on the Cameroonian women’s mindset, usually instigated by women’s mothers who used to be house wives, not very educated, and staying at home to take care of the children, the husband and the household, even though some of those mothers were doing informal works to earn some money for the family. Therefore, as it was seen in many countries like in UK, France, USA, during the past decades, women were at the origin of many fights that lead to the adoption of new laws and new way of life to which men and the rest of the population just had to adapt to. In Cameroon too, women will most probably be at the origin of some major mental and social liberations (not libertinism) that will bring social changes in the country.

Thus, all our female participants during the interview talked about the fact that, for them, it was not even an option to be house wife for the rest of their lives, and that it is important for a woman to earn her own money, so that she would be respected by their man. For those women, they think that, today if a woman does not work or at least earn her own money, there is a high probability that her husband will see her as a mere consumer in the house, someone who does not contribute in anything, only eating what is provided by the husband. Even though both men and women know that it is the husband who is the first bread provider, hearing from the husband that she is unproductive is like a big insult to a woman’s dignity, one of the worse insult for women. Many mothers among the old couples, suffered from this ‘humiliation’ by their husband, as it was revealed by our elderly female participants during the interview (P1 and

P10). This is the reason why many Cameroonian mothers and aunts decided to educate their young female children not only to marital tasks but mostly as future educated working women. However, half of our male participants (P11, P12, P15, P16 and P18) who rather think that, among the wrong and worse advises that many women have received from their mothers or aunts, there is the one of being absolutely financially independent by all means. Men think that, such arguments mislead women in their nature and objectives as women and mothers because it causes them to unnecessarily compete with men when they are married. On the other hand, women think that, this is the best advice a women can ever receive before getting married today if she wants to avoid irrelevant frustrations. Thus, from that position, one can understand or conclude that, today, the new generation of young women's self-development and fulfillment in the society and in their marriage, start by her financial autonomy, and this was best explained by our elderly female participants who both said that:

"I got married too early, and I did not have the chance to pursue my studies to the level I wanted to become what I wanted. I was reduced to ask every little thing to my husband, and sometimes his way of giving or replying was so frustrating that I regretted not to have my own money to solve my problems by myself. This is the reason why I have always encouraged my children to continue their education and find a job, be autonomous before getting married"... (P1 and P10).

Nonetheless, it should be mentioned that, this is a matter of choice depending on each family and the education that mothers give to their daughters. That education is still tradition in some rural areas of Cameroon where young girls are still educated to their primary role of wife and mother. Also, the education given by parents obviously differ for male children who receives different advice and mindset when they grow up. Thus, there is an existing divergence of opinion between both genders here because, men are still educated to their traditional primary roles, in a society where women are growing up with newly shaped habits and way of thinking.

#### **4.6. Many Cameroonian Women are now Feminists to Fight against Men**

This is in reference to feminism as known in western countries, where women are organizing movements to fight for equal rights with men and for women's emancipation in the society, putting woman at the center of social researches and achievements (Stacey & Thorne, 1985, p. 304). Therefore, Cameroonian men are convinced that, if their Cameroonian wives want to follow this movements and the ideology behind it, it will be dangerous for the family's stability and women's primary role will be threatened. It is well known that Cameroonian men living in Cameroon are still very conservative and traditionalist in terms of gender roles.

Feminist movements, as mentioned earlier in this work, were one of the elements that triggered social changes in western countries. So, if a black women feminism is adopted by some Cameroonian women, a contextualized feminism to their realities, then women would be definitely considered as leaders of change in the Cameroonian society. A growing number of the Cameroonian women living out of the country tend to embrace the white feminism and know how to fight for their rights.

However, in the Cameroonian context, any women who is fighting for her rights or denouncing to the authorities any mistreatment on her or her children committed by the husband particularly, is usually called a feminist. Thus, many women who do not want this appellation on them are sometimes discouraged to continue their fights even when it is legal. This controversial situation was also witnessed in the USA among young women, who do not want

the etiquette of 'feminist' but want their rights to be respected though (Moi, 2006, p. 1735). Many prefer to pretend and let go of many injustices against them, especially when families are involved.

This situation was well explained by all the female participants especially P1, P2, P5 and P10 who described their cases particularly in the sense that made us to understand that, they were ready to denounce their husbands to social services when they were not taking care of the children properly; some were ready to quit the marriage because the husband did not respect their marriage engagement, like staying faithful to one woman, not mistreating them because of a second wife, taking care of their wife and children in all cases, etc. P2 was particularly affected because, as an educated women, she wanted to fight for her rights and her child's own. She was ready to do a lot but was stopped in her fights.

"My husband does not take care of me anymore; he provides for the minimum for our child. When I was the only wife, he was taking good care of us, everything was fine until when he took a second wife without informing me, without my concern. I wanted to divorce after that betrayal, because that was not what we agreed on before marriage. My family and his family asked me not to divorce, to keep my family for my child to grow up with her father. In my inner self, this is not the life I wanted to lie with my husband, but they have convinced me to stay. This inner conflict makes me sad and sick..." (P2, a married women in her 40s, middle class employee).

As it can be seen, social and family pressure even discourage women to fight for themselves just to keep some fake family life wherein most of them are not happy and satisfied. Even those who can afford to pursue some legal procedures in court are not allow to do so if they are not determined enough to fight by themselves.

On the other hand, we had most of our male participants who stated that, young women today are influenced by white feminists copied from western countries, and they raise their voice for every little problem and this makes the marital life difficult with most of them. Those men continued by defending that, their mothers and elderly parents were not like that; mothers used to preserve their husbands and their families. Nowadays, women want to show to men that they are strong enough to fight them back if they feel attacked. A powerful statement was repeated by our male participants during the interview:

"You yell at your own wife today, she can call police on you or call her brothers as reinforcement. If she does not have a good family who advises her, she can send you to jail".

This example was given by almost all our male participants (P15, P14, P20 and P19, P16) when explaining to which extend the situation has gone and they were denouncing it as one of the factors causing divorces of young Cameroonian couples.

Thus, on this point too, there is a divergence of opinion between both genders.

#### **4.7. Women are no longer Patient in Marriage with their Husbands!**

This was noticed from the researcher's observations on the field, but also stated by all the female participants in our sampling. Thus, certain behaviors and habits have emerged since few decades now on the female gender. Some habits like infidelity, divorce or separations have increased, and men and women think that it comes from the high level of women's liberation these past years. This liberation came up after the opening of the country to the rest of the

world through internet with social media where Cameroonians had access to a quite lot of information on social and sexual life, which used to be limited before. The lack of patience in couples comes in whenever the husband has financial difficulty, or does not provide enough attention and sexual satisfaction to their wives, among other factors.

Thus, after field observations, literature on the subject and the participants' replies to the questions of fast growing cases of early divorces and infidelity in Cameroon, it can be stated that, men as well as women put the bigger responsibility on women. Our male participants think that, if women were patient and pure as our mothers used to be, we would not have infidelity cases; particularly as they are the ones to suffer more from the consequences, because a woman who is caught cheating is usually divorced by her husband. The female participants on the other hand think that, many women have lost their modesty and shame, and at the same time, they do no longer want to endure toxic romantic relationships as our mothers used to do. As soon as there is a problem or an element of their daily satisfaction is missing, most of the women now prefer to start by complaining a lot, then cheating for some of them (the level is female infidelity is increasing, for those who confess or who are caught, among the single and married women in the country), then quit the relationship or divorce.

"Today, most of the young women don't want to waste their energy fighting for a marriage where they feel that they are not fully satisfied. However, it is dirty for a woman to cheat. So, it is always better to divorce instead. This seems egoistic from a women especially as mother, but many courageous ones now prefer their wellbeing, especially those who work and can take care of themselves and their children alone..." (P1 to P10).

Some women openly confessed that, very soon their patience will reach the limit and they will simply ask for divorce and move on. For them, it is better to have in mind that you are alone, and fighting for yourself, instead of supporting a husband who cannot even take his responsibilities as a man. Thus, the female participant P6 clearly stated that:

"Today, I am still patient with my husband but from what I can perceive in our family life, I think that I will not end up my life with him as husband. I am now 80% sure to separate from my husband in a near future, given that, he does not fulfill his responsibilities as a father towards our children; I do more than him. Not to mention his duties as a fair husband in the way it is recommended in Islam, as a polygamous husband..." (P6).

The assertion concerning women's increasing lack of patience towards their husbands, as mentioned by all our female participants can be seen as a justification or a starting point to many family issues today in Cameroon. More infidelity of both men and women, separations and divorces, even misunderstandings or problems with in-laws and so on, can be sited in the list of problems that can will continue to increase during the future years if women continue to think in such a way. However, from our analysis, it comes out that, if Cameroonian women stop some of their new bad habits like infidelity, and regain their dignity, men will automatically follow and stop too, given that, they need each other to commit an act of infidelity for instance.

Thus, this is certainly the reason why, both men and women think that, everything changing today in the Cameroonian social life is instigated by women, who are mothers, educating and shaping the habits and mindset of children who are the future generations. However, it can be noticed that, all the said changes that are gradually appearing are a reply to men's behaviors and how they used to treat women before. So, it becomes ambiguous to define if Cameroonian women really fight for themselves or, as many men think, they fight to show to men that they

can also reply back to their various unfairness, inequalities, injustice, frustrations, lack of respect, superiority, lack of attention, among other reasons.

Therefore, if we understand social changes as a reply to patriarchy and male privileges in short, then it can be concluded that, men and women are inter-influencing each other in the process of social changes in Cameroon; and the more women will face injustice and dissatisfaction inside family which is the smallest unit of the society, the more women will rebel and their mindset will evolve, resulting thus into more changes in families and then in the society.

## **5. Conclusion**

To sum it up, this piece of work brings up the diversity and contradiction that exists between the Cameroonian men and women's opinions on the current society orientations, especially concerning the issues of working women, structural changes in families and their immediate consequences. Thus, one of the direct consequences of women's entrance in public places to work is on children's education. Therefore, another point that comes out consequently from the fact that many women are working more and more is that, some roles have started to be mixed up together between husband and wife. Now, this can be seen as an advantage or an inconvenient, depending on each couple's vision (traditional or modern). Reason why this research is important in the sense that, it displays people's real deep opinions on family issues. However, when talking about social changes, it is important to recall that, it mainly has to do with family structure, couple way of life, gender role mix up, changes in children's education, new habits inserted inside family life, etc. Thus, the most recent changes observed today, which is also in constant increase in the society is women who work mostly out of the house. Thus, men in this research are concretely complaining and accusing women of learning new habits from western countries, through all the new means of communication like the social media. Men think that, women are changing because of all what they learn from other modern women. They argue that, women want to copy or learn white feminism which is not even appropriate to their black African context and their daily fights, and that they are transmitting those bad habits to their children who are the future of the society.

Women on their side complain that men today have changed too. They became too irresponsible. They do not treat women properly as real men are supposed to, and do not fully take care of their family and household charges as our fathers used to do before. Men think that, women are no longer patient in marriage, and that they love money and comfort more than their husbands. In fact, many mothers used to marry quite early, during their teenage, but they later regretted that situation because most of them could not develop their potential and skills in school and work places. Thus, those mothers advised most of their daughters not to do the same mistake. So, the level of educated girls is increasing every year in Cameroon.

Female participants have explained that, they are almost obliged to go out and work to support their husbands in the household charges, or else, the children and the family will lack many vital resources. However, many men feel threatened in their natural territory which is the public place, with the increasing presence of women in different jobs. Unfortunately for them, women are more ambitious today, and don't want to depend on their husbands financially. Most of those women were wisely advised by their mothers and aunts who told them that, 'a woman's first husband is her job' and no young woman deserves to be called a 'consumer' by her husband today. Most of the young Cameroonian women today have been educated to become

workers in the society, and thus, to avoid receiving those humiliating words that traumatized elderly mothers in their marriages. So they educated their female children particularly to hard work, and probably forgot to transmit marriage science to most of those young girls.

The country's economic situation has worsen the level of families' way of life and standard. Inflation is imminent, life is becoming very expensive as time passes, and men need extra income from their wives to maintain a certain standard for themselves and their children. Thus, many men do not see or understand yet that, they will need to adjust and learn new tasks to help their wives in the house works and other tasks like children's education, to catch up current women's level. This is because most of the women on their own, have learnt to work outside, gained autonomy, and do some of the men's tasks sometimes better than them.



## References

- Azevedo, M. J. P., Gwendolyn (1986). The changing status of women in cameroon: An overview; *The Western Journal of Black Studies*; Pullman., Wash. Vol. 10 (4), 195.
- Boserup, E. (1983). *La femme face au développement économique* [compte-rendu]. *Revue Tiers Monde*, 24 (95), 698-699.
- Bucrep Cameroon (2023). The number of girls who go to school in rural and urban areas in Cameroon. Retrieved from:  
[https://cameroon.opendataforafrica.org/data#source=Bureau+Central+des+Recensements+et+des+Etudes+de+Population+\(BUCREP\)+-+Cameroon](https://cameroon.opendataforafrica.org/data#source=Bureau+Central+des+Recensements+et+des+Etudes+de+Population+(BUCREP)+-+Cameroon)
- Bryman, A. (2003). *Social Science Methods* (2nd ed.) New York, U.S.A: Oxford University.
- Camer.be (2023). The divorce rate in Douala Cameroon in 2023. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.camer.be/55247/11:1/cameroun-360-demandes-de-divorce-en-un-an-a-douala-cameroon.html>
- Cameroon National Civil Status Office (BUNEC) (2018). Retrieved from:  
<https://ins-cameroun.cm/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Report-Final-31-05-2021.pdf>
- Cameroon Institute of Statistics (2021): EDS-MICS, . Retrieved from:  
<https://ins-cameroun.cm/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/DEPLIANT-JIF-2021-vers-07-05-2021-Vers-DG-francais.pdf>  
/ <https://ins-cameroun.cm/statistique/journee-internationale-de-la-femme-edition-2021/>
- Cameroon Institute of Statistics (2023). Retrieved from:  
[https://www.fluechtlingshilfe.ch/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publikationen/Herkunftslaenderberichte/Afrika/Kamerun/230414\\_KAM\\_mariage\\_force\\_femicide.pdf](https://www.fluechtlingshilfe.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Publikationen/Herkunftslaenderberichte/Afrika/Kamerun/230414_KAM_mariage_force_femicide.pdf)
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. USA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Demir, İ., & Roukaya, M. N. (2018). *Everyday Interpersonal Experiences of African International Students in Turkey: A Phenomenological Study*. Current Debates In Education, 20-63, London: IJOPEC publication.
- Horowitz, R., & Gerson, K. (2002). *Observation and interviewing: options and choices in qualitative research*. In *Qualitative research: An international guide to issues in practice*, London: Sage.
- Nkwi, P. N. (1987). *Transformations of African Marriage*, The Changing Role of Women and their Contributions to the Domestic Economy in Cameroon, London: Routledge.
- Makiwane, M., Gumede, N. A., Makoae, M., & Vawda, M. (2017). Family in a changing South Africa: structures, functions and the welfare of members. *South African Review of Sociology*, 48(2), 49-69.
- Moi, T. (2006). "I am not a feminist, but...": how feminism became the f-word. *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 121(5), 1735-1741.
- Odetola, T. O., Oloruntimehin, O., & Aweda, D. A. (1983). *Man and society in Africa: an introduction to sociology*. London: Longman
- Ogundare, S. F. (2010). Changes in family types and functions among Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria since 1960. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 6(4), 447-457.
- Oppong, G., Monebenimp, F., & Dapi Nzefa, L. (2019). 'You just have to grin and bear'—emotional suppression among women in polygyny in Cameroon. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 21(8), 946-956.
- Sidze, E. M., & Defo, B. K. (2013). Effects of parenting practices on sexual risk-taking among young people in Cameroon. *BMC public health*, 13(1), 1-14.
- Stacey, J., & Thorne, B. (1985). The missing feminist revolution in sociology. *Social problems*, 32(4), 301-316.