

# Challenging Gender Equality: An Examination of Gender Egalitarianism in the South Kivu Province, Democratic Republic of Congo

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## Abstract

Egalitarianism is a concept that upholds the equal treatment of all people, irrespective of the diversity of backgrounds across the human race. Gender egalitarianism thus urges the essential need to treat people of both genders equally. Although there is a large body of literature on gender inequality in the South Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), there is a lack of current literature that specifically addresses gender egalitarianism in this part of the Republic. This paper explores the effects of gender egalitarianism on people in the study area by examining this phenomenon in the context of the cultural, social, economic, and political lives of the residents of the study area. The findings are aligned with the gender structure theory to enhance its validity. The findings demonstrate various positive trends and improvements in gender egalitarianism in certain aspects of the socio-economic, political, and cultural lives and norms of people in the study area, but ongoing research is required to establish the causality and directionality of the observed associations and to generalize findings to the entire population. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of gender egalitarianism in South Kivu Province and it is envisaged that the findings will inform better targeted and more effective policy developments and practical intervention strategies to curb gender inequality and gender-related conflicts in the South Kivu Province.

## Keywords

Gender Egalitarianism, South Kivu Province, Politic Participation, Cultural and Social Norms

## 1. Introduction

Egalitarianism is a concept that highlights the perspective that all people should be treated equally, irrespective of their gender or cultural, social, economic, and political backgrounds (Cano, 2019). Gender egalitarianism essentially refers to the equal treatment of men and women in all spheres of society. This paper is based on a study that sought to determine whether the equal distribution of resources and power had improved between men and women in the study area. South Kivu Province is a part of the DRC that is notoriously associated with the abuse of women. Social welfare conditions were evaluated to determine if society was indiscriminate in terms of the wellbeing of all people in the area, while the political aspect was examined by determining whether gender imbalance existed in the distribution of leadership roles. The economic aspect of people's lives was also examined by determining whether there was fair and equitable treatment of both genders in the workplace (Miller, 2020).

This study investigated gender egalitarianism in the study area through the lenses of the gender structure theory. The theory of gender structure examines the intricate ways in which social structures shape and are shaped by gender. Risman (2018) introduced the theory of gender structure. A theoretical framework was introduced in 2017 to facilitate the comprehension of how gender is reproduced and contested across diverse levels of society. Understanding the multifaceted nature of gender is imperative, as it is constructed not only at the individual level but also embedded within social structures that permeate various domains of society, such as work, family, and gender identity. The impacts on individuals extend across various levels of society, encompassing the individual, interactional, and macro levels. This paper explores the intricate relationship between individual gender identities, interactional expectations, and institutional expectations, which collectively influence gender relations. Scarborough and Risman (2017) emphasize the interconnected nature of these levels, and their reciprocal effects is crucial (Fleming & Agnew-Brune, 2015). According to these authors, the theory of gender structure suggests that gender is a characteristic of social organizations and is deeply ingrained in the processes, practices, and power dynamics of different social institutions.

Through the application of this theory, individuals can acquire invaluable insights into the persistent challenges surrounding gender equality and the complex dynamics of gender in modern society.

Several studies were scrutinized to establish existing knowledge in the gender egalitarianism sphere, and several earlier studies were identified that established a foundation for the current study. For instance, a study was conducted by Dilli, Carmichael and Rijpma (2019) in the United Kingdom (UK) to gain a historical perspective on the issue of gender in/equality. The latter researchers found that gender bias persisted and that women were still discriminated against as they accounted for only 23% representation in Parliament. Additionally, the International Centre for Research on Women (2018) did a study to examine Africa's

progress in matters of gender equality and human development. It was established that girls in the developing world were still subjected to gender inequality, which they deemed a matter of concern. The study conducted by [Cano \(2019\)](#) to evaluate gender and power concerns in the North and South Kivu provinces of the DRC also established that this country had one of the lowest rates of gender equality on the Equality Index. The latter author argues for robust research on gender egalitarianism in the South Kivu Province in the DRC, which is a challenge that the current author embraced.

## 2. Literature Review

Gender egalitarianism emphasizes the human rights notion that all people are equal and should receive equal treatment in all spheres of life regardless of their cultural, social, economic, and political backgrounds ([Schouten, 2019](#)). This concept holds that men and women have equal rights and responsibilities and it denounces the notion of divided roles across gender lines at home and in the workplace ([Schouten, 2019](#)). This perspective establishes a foundation for evaluating the implications of the different treatment of people based on their gender. For instance, gender egalitarianism is pivotal in examining whether all people are allowed equal access to wealth to promote their economic empowerment in society ([Schouten 2019; Kavira et al., 2015](#)). It also considers how different cultures treat people to safeguard the social welfare of all human beings regardless of their gender ([Schouten, 2019](#)). The political sphere is also notorious for gender imbalance as comparatively few women have held positions of authority in the political arena ([Miller, 2020](#)). Therefore, based on the findings of the larger study, this paper will evaluate the effects of gender egalitarianism on cultural and social norms, economic empowerment, and political participation in the South Kivu Province of the DRC.

Gender egalitarianism in this study area was evaluated based on the gender structure theory as posited by [Risman \(2018\)](#). This theory underscores the necessity to analyze the correlation between social structure and individuals. The theory addresses both the conditions in which gender equality occurs and the process of generating gender inequality in particular circumstances, and allows the development of knowledge of these dynamics to shape future interventions. The theory also suggests an investigation into the influence of structure on the choices individuals make and the interactions in which they engage, while it also explains how structures generate, support, and reshape current systems ([Risman, 2018: p. 443](#)). Similar to other feminist theories, this theory posits that cultural and societal norms contribute to the establishment of gendered expectations and roles, specifically in relation to employment choices and family dynamics.

According to Goal 5 (SDG5) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), gender equality should be achieved world-wide by 2030 ([USAID, 2023](#)). According to the latter text, gender egalitarianism is a basic right that fosters the

creation of a sustainable society, promotes harmony, and helps to build prosperity in the world. However, despite this ideal, gender inequality persists across the world and, where it prevails, it causes stagnation and hinders social progress (Schouten, 2019). For example, USAID (2023) posits that women spend three times more of their time conducting unpaid care and domestic chores compared to men, while unfair treatment still persists in the labor market where women earn less than men. These trends illustrate that the world is not likely to attain SDG5 by 2030. USAID (2023) also indicates that, globally, as many as half of the world's married women are denied decision-making rights, particularly regarding sexual affairs. The significant burden that women continue to bear in terms of domestic work and child care also suggests that the vision of achieving SDG5 by 2030 may be unattainable. The latter source also notes that fewer women than men hold positions of leadership, while laws that discriminate against women still exist across the world (USAID, 2023). This trend prompted the conceptualization and execution of the current study in the quest to steer the drive towards establishing gender egalitarianism in South Kivu Province in the DRC.

Dilli, Carmichael and Rijpma (2019) conducted a study to establish a historical perspective on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) in the UK based on five societal spheres, namely politics, society, health, economics, and household. These authors base their argument on the hypothesis of a “quiet revolution” that was developed by Goldin (2014) whose study wished to determine how gender equality had evolved over the years. According to Dilli, Carmichael and Rijpma (2019), the achievements of women should be measured based on their own merits instead of being compared to those of their male counterparts. The latter authors investigated the progress of women's involvement and achievements in education, politics, social participation, and their engagement in the labor market, and argue that discrimination against women still exists despite that fact that more women and girls have achieved various educational qualifications compared to men. However, they argue that, on the political front, females are still far behind men as only 23% of women have attained parliamentary representation on a global scale. This trend is contrary to the expected rate that is due to the continuous rise in women's level of education and the shift to democracy in many parts of the world.

The International Centre for Research on Women (2018) conducted research to review the progress of Africa regarding human development and gender equality. The study argues that early marriage for girls still prevails in developing countries where about 30% of girls are married before the age of 18 years. This finding suggests that gender inequality is still an issue of concern globally despite efforts to advance gender egalitarianism. Moreover, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2015) conducted a study in sub-Saharan Africa to evaluate its rate of sustainable development based on the African post-2015 agenda for women's rights and gender equality. Based on the findings,

the study posits that females' access to education is still limited in this region. The study argues that boys are offered preferential treatment in matters pertaining to education while numerous girls are still denied this basic right (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2017) also conducted a study to review aspects of gender egalitarianism and human development across the continent of Africa, and found that there was minimal development in terms of gender egalitarianism in Africa as thirty-six countries still showed low rates of development, twelve countries had medium development, and only five countries recorded high development. The UNDP (2017) study employed various human development indicators such as comparing Africa's progress with that of developed regions by assessing factors such as living standards, health status, and access to education. The UNDP (2017) also examined the variation between African males' and females' life expectancy by examining their health status and comparing the average years of schooling between male and female adults to determine their exposure to knowledge. Males' and females' ability to pay rates and taxes was also compared to assess their standard of living. The study exposed the prevalence of significant gender inequality when Africa's GII based on the UNDP's indicators was compared with that of other regions (UNDP, 2017).

To corroborate the notion that gender inequality persists in the DRC, Cano (2019) argues that over half of the four million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in this region are women, and this scholar thus raises the concern that this country has failed to establish measures to discourage the unequal treatment of women. Moreover, authors have also argued that fewer women than men hold positions of leadership in South Kivu Province in the DRC, indicating discrimination against women who have fewer representatives than men to advocate for their rights (Miller, 2020; Cano, 2019). According to Kavira et al. (2015), a report by the Geneva Foundation for Medical Education and Research (GFMER) of 2017 states that Congolese laws subordinate women by denying them control over their sexual and reproductive health. Cano (2019) further indicates that there are far fewer female judges and prosecutors in the South Kivu Province than men, arguing that this fact renders the fight against gender inequality ineffective. Kavira et al. (2015) maintain that there is a lack of trust in the judicial system as the enforcement of court sentences for sexual-related acts is minimal. For instance, the payment of compensation to assist female victims is often ignored and state agents make little effort to enforce such payment (Cano, 2019; Kavira et al., 2015).

In terms of gender and power issues in the North and South Kivu Provinces in the DRC, Cano (2019) states that the DRC is ranked in the 152nd position out of 160 countries on the Gender Equality Index. The latter study also states that the rate of women and girls aged between 15 and 49 who experienced sexual and physical violence is 56.6% (Cano, 2019). These poor performance rates highlight

the high prevalence of gender inequality in the DRC compared to other developing countries, and therefore this report urges immediate action to stimulate gender egalitarianism in the country, with particular emphasis on the low social, economic, and political standing of women compared to that of men (Miller, 2020). It is for this reason that the current study deemed it essential to establish the effect of gender egalitarianism on the economic, political, and socio-cultural norms of people in the South Kivu Province in the DRC.

### 3. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design. According to McCombes (2021), a research approach that is comprehensive in nature is usually geared towards answering the “what?” and “how?” questions. The descriptive research framework was adopted because it enabled a comprehensive investigation into the topic under study (Silva, 2017). To achieve its objectives, the investigation employed the quantitative research approach. Quantitative research techniques require the gathering and analysis of numerical data with the aim of describing, predicting, or controlling the study variables (Mohajan, 2020).

The study was conducted in the South Kivu Province of the DRC and, more specifically, in Bukavu city. According to Faccin et al. (2022), South Kivu has a population of 5.8 million, ranking it as the third most densely populated province in the country following Kinshasa and North Kivu. South Kivu also ranks third among the provinces of the DRC with 1.4 million internally displaced persons and 690,000 post-conflict returnees (Faccin et al., 2022). Bukavu city accommodates a diverse community comprising individuals from different rural territories of South Kivu, including internally displaced persons and individuals from other provinces and countries (Bisoka, Mudinga, & Herdt, 2021). The variation in the population’s origins facilitated the collection of data from both urban and rural areas in this province. The city has experienced rapid growth due to a rural exodus and urbanization caused by conflicts linked to sexual violence, the persistent presence of war-mongering armed groups, better job opportunities in the city, and the urban population’s access to water and electricity (Bisoka, Mudinga, & Herdt, 2021). The city accommodates people of diverse ethnicities, religious affiliations, and various self-employed professions in the informal economy. With such a diverse and rapidly increasing population, it was crucial to undertake this study in order to gain a deeper understanding of gender egalitarianism in this setting.

The researcher employed a questionnaire, derived from McDaniel’s (2008) scale of gender egalitarianism, as the data collection tool. This questionnaire assessed gender egalitarianism in the economic, political, cultural, and social spheres of the society under study. The researcher conducted a pilot study involving 22 respondents prior to the actual data collection phase to test the applicability of the questionnaire. Data were then collected from a sample of 472 respondents in Bukavu city in the South Kivu Province of the DRC. Before data

collection, which was conducted in the first two weeks of February 2024, the respondents' consent was requested and obtained. 8 research assistants were trained prior to the field work on gender, peace, and conflict as well as the use of the KoboCollect application. The research assistants collected data from actual sample of respondents (472) using KoboCollect software via their Android or Apple phones. The research assistants who did not have the free KoboCollect software on their phones were requested to download it. Prior to data collection, the informants were assured that the information they provided would be treated with confidentiality and that it would only be used for academic and research purposes. The response rate was 99%. Apart from the data gathered in Bukavu city, the study also acquired additional data from rural areas to ensure that a representative sample of the South Kivu population was involved. To ensure data triangulation and to collect more detailed information from the KoboCollect software, four research assistants conducted in-depth interviews with people in the Kabare, Kalehe, Kamituga, and Walungu territories from 9 to 12 July 2024.

Approval for the study protocol, reference number CIRE 008/DPSK/118PP/2022, was granted by the Interdisciplinary Center for Ethic Research (CIRE) at the Université Evangélique en Afrique (UEA). The study obtained the consent of all the respondents after assuring them of the confidential nature of their participation. Moreover, the investigation adhered to all standard ethical procedures for research on intimate partner violence (IPV). Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) which generated descriptive tables and figures. T-tests and chi-squared tests were used to show the associations between the variables of interest. Phi and Cramer's V coefficients and exact significance measurements were determined to evaluate the strength and significance of the associations between the variables. Through content analysis, qualitative data were also analyzed to enhance understanding of the quantitative data. Phi and Cramer's V coefficients are standard effect size measures in chi-square tests. Phi and Cramer's V coefficients range from 0 (no association) to 1 (perfect association). Cramer's V is suitable for tables larger than  $2 \times 2$  and Phi is used for  $2 \times 2$  tables. Effect size helps interpret results beyond just statistical significance.

The study employed logistic regression to investigate the factors that contributed to gender inequality in the study area. The model comprised of 16 independent variables, with gender being the dependent variable (**Table 1**).

A summary was generated from model testing, revealing values of 302.069 for  $-2\log$  likelihood, 0.526 for Cox and Snell R Square, and 0.701 for Nagelkerke R square. Based on this summary and the Chi-square test by Hosmer and Lemeshow that was estimated at 3.67 with 8 degrees of freedom (df) and a p-value of 0.88, the model was considered viable. All these tests were conducted with a significance level of 5%. To mitigate bias, variables with frequency modalities below 10% were consolidated.

**Table 1.** Research variables.

Variable	Modalities
Gender	Male and female
Religion	Christian, muslims and others
Marital status	Single, married and widows/divorces
Ethnie	Bashi, barega, others internal the province, and others outside the province
Profession	Academic, business, agriculture, state and humanitarian persons, religion leaders, informal economic, medical personal, and jobless.
Education level	Secondary school and below, university and illiterate.
Equality when scarcity of job	Agree, disagree
Equality on woman capacity for politique	Agree, disagree
Believe about equal education for all	Agree, disagree
Believe about outside work for woman	Agree, disagree
Attitude/practices on the amount of money accessible to woman	Agree, disagree
Attitude towards a woman household duty	Agree, disagree
Equality on woman leadership position	Agree, disagree
Equality on Man having more resource than woman	Agree, disagree
Equality on the choice of having children and how many	Agree, disagree
Believe on the choice of clothes to wear for a woman	Agree, disagree

## 4. Results and Discussion

The purpose of this paper is to provide information on the influence of gender egalitarianism in the South Kivu Province of the DRC. Focusing on gender, the study examined the impact of education, religion, marital status, ethnicity, and profession on the lives and equality status of men and women in the study area.

### 4.1. Demographic Attributes of the Respondents

#### 4.1.1. Religion

This research involved 238 males (50.4% of the total sample) and 234 females (49.6% of the total sample). In terms of religion, 220 (52.4%) of the respondents

were Catholics, 190 (45.2%) were Protestants, and 53 (13.1%) adhered to “other” faiths. Apart from the respondents who adhered to the doctrines of the Anglican, Methodist, and Adventist denominations, there were those who stated they worshiped traditional Congolese gods or engaged in spiritual practices such as “Mayimayi”.

#### 4.1.2. Marital Status

Of the sample of 472 respondents, 298 (63.1%) were single, 138 (29.2%) were married, and 39 (7.6%) were widowed or divorced. Two major ethnic groups were represented, namely the Bashi (256 individuals or 54.2% of the sample) and “others” (164 or 39.05% of the sample).

#### 4.1.3. Education

When the respondents’ levels of education were explored, it was found that 113 individuals (23.9%) had no secondary school qualification, 346 individuals (73.3%) had a university level qualification or were university students, and 13 individuals (2.8%) were illiterate. The respondents represented a variety of professions that could be categorized into sectors. There was an academic sector (233 or 49.4%), a business sector (85 or 18%), an agricultural sector (10 or 2.1%), a state and humanitarian sector (29 or 6.1%), religious leaders (2 or 0.4%), an informal sector (24 or 5.1%), a medical sector (4 or 0.8%), and the unemployed sector (85 or 18%).

### 4.2. Relationships between Gender and Demographic Characteristics

Regarding the association between gender and education, the results suggested that there was a higher association between profession and gender compared to education level and gender. However, the Phi and Cramer’s V coefficients for the relationship between education level and gender were both weak (Phi 0.053 and Cramer’s V 0.053). Regarding the correlation between the respondents’ profession and gender, the Phi coefficient (0.168) and Cramer’s V (0.168) indicated a moderate level of association between the two variables.

When marital status and gender were compared (0.059), the result indicated a weak positive association, and the approximate significance of 0.436 also suggested that the association was not statistically significant.

In relation to the connections between ethnicity and gender, the symmetric measures indicated values of 0.078 (Phi and Cramer’s V) and 0.031 (Pearson’s R), signifying a weak correlation between ethnicity and gender. The exact significance rates (Phi 0.588 and Pearson’s R 0.497) were above 0.05 and thus indicated no significant relation between ethnicity and gender.

Regarding the relationship between religion and gender, the symmetric measures, namely Phi and Cramer’s V, both indicated 0.041, and Pearson’s R of 0.040, indicated a weak association between religion and gender. This was supported by Spearman’s correlation (exact significance 0.387) Furthermore, the

significance levels of Phi (0.714), Pearson's R (0.431), and Spearman's correlation (0.387) were all higher than 0.05, indicating that the correlation between religion and gender was not statistically significant.

### 4.3. The Economy and Gender Egalitarianism

The findings that are presented in **Table 2** revealed that the respondents, regardless of their religion, marital status, ethnicity, profession, or education, demonstrated support for gender equality in the workplace based on gender and households' resources management. In the results obtained from men (58% to 42% and 52.5% to 47.5% in terms of jobs and resources management respectively) and women (64.1% to 35.9%, and 62.8% to 37.2% in terms of jobs and resources management respectively). Nonetheless, variations were found among these diverse observed characteristics. For example, when considering their religious affiliations, the Christian respondents exhibited a strong egalitarian trend as 59.5% was in favor of and 40.5% was opposed to women working in times of job scarcity, and 53.8% was in favor of and 46.2% was opposed to men limiting women's resources to manage the household. Similarly, adherents of other religions displayed a strong preference for egalitarianism in both cases, with 75% in favor of and 25% opposed to these measures. It was notable that Muslims (41.7% in favor of and 58.3% against) were mostly against women working when there was job scarcity, while 62.5% was in favor of and 37.5% was opposed to men limiting women's resources to manage the household.

Another discrepancy was observed in the views regarding the employment of women during job scarcity, particularly among Muslims who exhibited a weaker trend than Christians (41.7% compared to 58.3%) in terms of household resource management. For instance, the phi and Cramer's V values for religion, marital status, and profession were 0.144, 0.116, and 0.131 respectively (**Table 2**). These values indicated a moderate positive correlation between these attributes and gender egalitarianism in the economy. The statistical analysis revealed an exact significance value of 0.006 for religion and 0.041 for marital status, indicating that the association was statistically significant. On the other hand, the exact significant values for ethnicity, profession, and education were 0.396, 0.326, and 0.821 respectively, indicating that the association was not statistically significant. In addition, Phi and Cramer's V values ranged from 0.035 to 0.121, suggesting a weak positive association between gender, religion, marital status, ethnicity, profession, education, and gender egalitarianism in the context of household resources management. The exact significance levels varied between 0.38 and 0.662, indicating a lack of statistical significance across all associations.

Previous studies have revealed that progress in addressing economic inequality has been less than remarkable in sub-Saharan Africa (Klasen & Lamanna, 2015). With regards to the post-conflict situation in the DRC, the government's inability to ensure basic necessities and the growing male unemployment rate have necessitated women to transcend traditional household roles and many

are now actively engaged in market-related work so that household partners can pool their resources for a joint household income. This explains the shift from traditional household economic management to a household economy that promotes gender equality, highlighting the clear benefit of recognizing women's role in the economy. According to [Never \(2014\)](#), such presence of gender egalitarianism within households has considerable ramifications for equitable resource allocation and influences the accessibility and sustainability of food in Southern Africa. It can also lead to a positive trend towards gender equality, joint financial decision-making in households ([Hu, 2021](#)), and better outcomes in terms of household well-being due to increased household income ([Setyari, Widanta, & Purbadharmaja, 2018](#)).

**Table 2.** Gender egalitarianism in the economy.

		Gender	Religion %	Marital status %	Ethnicity %	Profession %	Education %
Equality in the workplace	Less Egalitarian	Male (%)	42.0	42	42	42	42
		Female (%)	35.9	35.9	35.9	35.9	35.9
		Total N (%)	184 (39)	184 (39)	184 (39)	184 (39)	184 (39)
	More Egalitarian	Male (%)	58.0	58	58	58	58
		Female (%)	64.1	64.1	64.1	64.1	64.1
		Total N (%)	288 (61)	288 (61)	288 (61)	288 (61)	288 (61)
		Phi & Cramer's V	0.144	0.116	0.093	0.131	0.808
		Exact Significance	0.006	0.041	0.396	0.326	0.821
	Equality in households & resources management	Less Egalitarian	Male (%)	47.5	47.5	47.5	47.5
Female (%)			37.2	37.2	37.2	37.2	37.2
Total N (%)			200 (42.4)	200 (42.4)	200 (42.4)	200 (42.4)	200 (42.4)
More Egalitarian		Male (%)	52.5	52.5	52.5	52.5	52.5
		Female (%)	62.8	62.8	62.8	62.8	62.8
		Total N (%)	272 (57.6)	272 (57.6)	272 (57.6)	272 (57.6)	272 (57.6)
		Phi & Cramer's V	0.035	0.047	0.072	0.121	0.118
		Exact Significance	0.594	0.588	0.662	0.456	0.38

Note: Data processed using SPSS 20.

#### 4.4. Gender Egalitarianism in Politics

This section examines the effects of gender egalitarianism on various societal dimensions in the South Kivu Province, namely religion, marital status, ethnicity, profession, and education. The calculations to determine Phi and Cramer's V

coefficients and exact significance were performed to assess the association between gender and these factors. The application of Phi and Cramer’s V and the exact significance analysis provided a means to measure and understand the strength and significance of the correlations between gender and various factors associated with gender egalitarianism.

According to **Table 3**, men had a stronger perception than women that women do not have enough capacity in politics. The findings also revealed variations among the demographic characteristics of religion, marital status, ethnicity, profession, and education. These variations ranged from 55.9% to 66% of the respondents who thought that men are pessimists, and from 44.1% to 34% who thought men are optimists. A variation with acute trends was revealed in relation to ethnicity (66%) and religion (62.1%) which expressed pessimism for women’s capacity to engage significantly in politics.

**Table 3.** Gender egalitarianism in politics.

		Gender	Religion %	Marital status %	Ethnicity %	Profession %	Education %	
Capacity of women to play a role in politics	Less egalitarian	Male %	55.9	55.9	55.9	55.9	55.9	
		Female %	40.2	40.2	40.2	40.2	40.2	
		<b>Total N (%)</b>	<b>227 (48.1)</b>	<b>227 (48.1)</b>	<b>227 (48.1)</b>	<b>227 (48.1)</b>	<b>227 (48.1)</b>	
	More egalitarian	Male %	44.1	44.1	44.1	44.1	44.1	
		Female %	59.8	59.8	59.8	59.8	59.8	
		<b>Total N (%)</b>	<b>245 (51.9)</b>	<b>245 (51.9)</b>	<b>245 (51.9)</b>	<b>245 (51.9)</b>	<b>245 (51.9)</b>	
	Phi & Cramer’s V		0.012	0.066	0.066	0.094	0.035	
	Exact significance		0.971	0.365	0.727	0.784	0.752	
	Women’s leadership position	Less egalitarian	Male %	40.3	40.3	40.3	40.3	40.3
			Female %	27.4	27.4	27.4	27.4	27.4
<b>Total N (%)</b>			<b>227 (66.1)</b>	<b>227 (66.1)</b>	<b>227 (66.1)</b>	<b>227 (66.1)</b>	<b>227 (66.1)</b>	
More egalitarian		Male	59.7	59.7	59.7	59.7	59.7	
		Female	72.6	72.6	72.6	72.6	72.6	
		<b>Total N (%)</b>	<b>245 (33.9)</b>	<b>245 (33.9)</b>	<b>245 (33.9)</b>	<b>245 (33.9)</b>	<b>245 (33.9)</b>	
Phi & Cramer’s V		0.067	0.119	0.106	0.182	0.069		
Exact significance		0.364	0.36	0.259	0.023	0.345		

Note: Data processed using SPSS 20.

The data (**Table 3**) revealed a negligible correlation existed between gender and political perceptions, as indicated by a Phi and Cramer’s V value of 0.012

and a significantly high p-value of 0.971. This implies that the respondents from the South Kivu Province perceived no significant correlation between gender and the extent of egalitarianism in political positioning of men and women. The results indicated a moderate association between gender and egalitarianism in relation to women's capacity in politics and their leadership positions, as indicated by Phi and Cramer's V values that ranged from 0.067 to 0.182 respectively. Furthermore, the p-values for these variables were found to be less than 0.05, indicating a substantial correlation between gender and the level of egalitarianism in this region. This finding corroborates the notion that women in South Kivu Province face numerous obstacles when they want to access politics and leadership positions, which is arguably due to the detrimental consequences of the ongoing conflicts in this region as well as women's persistently low societal standing and limited economic resources (Nfundiko, 2015).

Based on the findings, it may be argued that gender egalitarianism is somewhat deficient in the South Kivu Province. According to a report published by the World Economic Forum titled *The Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, a significant disparity exists between men and women in terms of political empowerment, and this seems to be specifically true in the DRC. This claim regarding the deficiency of gender egalitarianism in politics in the study area is clearly reinforced by the data in **Table 2**. According to Bertelsmann Stiftung (2024), traditional customs and patriarchy remain at the core of the structure of a vast majority of institutions in the DRC, whether they are private or public, and are significant obstacles to women's ability to access and actively engage in formal political entities such as parliament, executive structures, and political parties. This is also true of women's position in the informal sector such as in civic groups (Maria, 2015). The findings that were elicited in the South Kivu Province align with the results of Varghese's (2020) study that was conducted in India, as the latter study also found that women's political participation continued to encounter obstacles despite some advancements. Gender seems to remain a significant factor in women's ability to engage in politics and hold leadership positions, and this negates the ideal of equality in the political domain (Varghese, 2020).

When considered collectively, the current and reviewed studies underscore the essentiality of addressing gender inequality in all its manifestations and emphasize the significance of advocating for gender egalitarianism in society. It is imperative to shift societal attitudes by emphasizing the significance of public gender egalitarianism, with specific focus on women's participation in politics and the significant role they must play in leadership positions. The latter should of course be propagated without disregarding the need for their empowerment across various other sectors of life as well (Woo, Goldberg, & Solt, 2023).

The relationship between gender and egalitarianism in relation to women's participation in politics and their representation in leadership roles was found to be moderately significant, with Phi and Cramer's V values ranging from 0.067 to

0.182. Furthermore, the p-values for these variables were found to be less than 0.05, indicating a significant association between gender and the level of egalitarianism in the region under study.

In summary, the study demonstrated a lack of gender egalitarianism in the variables that were explored. The findings suggest that, despite women's demonstrated competence as leaders and as the catalysts for progress, their access to leadership roles in politics continues to be impeded by the notion of gender inequality. [Mbilizi \(2013\)](#) and [Shvedova \(2022\)](#) argue that evidence of the lack of egalitarianism is evident in persistent discriminatory legislation that is prejudiced against women, limited educational opportunities for girls and women, and various gendered obstacles, all of which undermine women's involvement and leadership representation in politics and other fields in the South Kivu society.

#### **4.5. Gender Egalitarianism in Terms of Cultural and Social Norms**

In its exploration of gender egalitarianism in cultural and social norms, this study identified education, religion, marital status, ethnicity, and professional development as key components of societal life. [Table 3](#) presents data on the level of gender egalitarianism across the following variables: women having more resources than men, women working outside the home, and the pre-eminence of men's decision-making power.

When the respondents' perceptions were elicited to determine if they thought that women possessed more resources than men, the outcomes demonstrated ([Table 4](#)) a more and less egalitarian tendency of 66.5% against only 33.5% of more egalitarian trends irrespective of gender, religion, marital status, ethnicity, and profession. Concerning women working outside the household, the results indicated a more egalitarian trend (75% for more egalitarian against 25% for less egalitarian). For pre-eminence of men's decision-making, the results indicated a more less egalitarian trend of 75.7% of respondents against 24.6% of more egalitarian trend.

Based on the Phi and Cramer's V values and exact significance values ([Table 4](#)) for each variable, there were no notable variations between the respondents' attitudes towards women having greater resources than men and the different characteristics of the respondents. The results also indicated a variation in gender egalitarianism in cultural and social norms in the variable "women having greater resources than men". The phi and Cramer's V values for this category ranged from 0.011 to 0.069, signifying low values that suggested a weak correlation. Furthermore, the exact significance values for this category varied from 0.213 to 0.966, surpassing the widely adopted threshold of 0.05. This indicated the absence of statistical significance, thus suggesting no significant effect of gender egalitarianism on cultural and social norms in the South Kivu Province based on gender, religion, marital status, ethnicity, profession, and education in the category of "women having more resources than men".

**Table 4.** Gender egalitarianism in terms of cultural and social norms.

		<b>Gender %</b>	<b>Religion %</b>	<b>Marital status %</b>	<b>Ethnicity %</b>	<b>Profession %</b>	<b>Education %</b>
Women having more resources than men	More Egalitarian	Male %	36.1	36.1	36.1	36.1	36.1
		Female %	30.8	30.8	30.8	30.8	30.8
		Total N (%)	158 (33.5)	158 (33.5)	158 (33.5)	158 (33.5)	158 (33.5)
	Less Egalitarian	Male %	63.9	63.9	63.9	63.9	63.9
		Female %	69.2	69.2	69.2	69.2	69.2
		Total N (%)	314 (66.5)	314 (66.5)	314 (66.5)	314 (66.5)	314 (66.5)
		Phi & Cramer's V	0.011	0.055	0.067	0.142	0.069
		Exact significance	0.966	0.480	0.724	0.213	0.341
	Women working outside the home	More Egalitarian	Male %	77.7	77.7	77.7	77.7
Female %			72.2	72.2	72.2	72.2	72.2
Total N (%)			354 (75)	354 (75)	354 (75)	354 (75)	354 (75)
Less Egalitarian		Male	22.3	22.3	22.3	22.3	22.3
		Female	27.8	27.8	27.8	27.8	27.8
		Total N (%)	118 (25)	118 (25)	118 (25)	118 (25)	118 (25)
		Phi & Cramer's V	0.090	0.038	0.041	0.076	0.053
		Exact significance	0.138	0.687	0.951	0.894	0.544
Preeminence of men's decision-making power		Less Egalitarian	Male %	78.2	78.2	78.2	78.2
	Female %		72.6	72.6	72.6	72.6	72.6
	Total N (%)		356 (75.4)	356 (75.4)	356 (75.4)	356 (75.4)	356 (75.4)
	More Egalitarian	Male	52	52	52	52	52
		Female	27.4	27.4	27.4	27.4	27.4
		Total N (%)	116 (24.6)	116 (24.6)	116 (24.6)	116 (24.6)	116 (24.6)
		Phi & Cramer's V	0.107	0.020	0.052	0.081	0.042
		Exact significance	0.063	0.927	0.871	0.897	0.664

Note: Data processed using SPSS 20.

To examine potential causal relationships among variables, logistic regression was performed in the study utilizing 15 independent variables. The dependent variable was gender and the results are presented in **Table 5** below.

Based on the data presented in this table (**Table 5**), three variables played a significant role in explaining gender egalitarianism in the South Kivu Province.

The statistical analysis revealed that both marital status ( $B = 0.607$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.029) and attitude towards women ( $B = 7.189$ ,  $p$ -value < 0.001) had a significant positive impact. However, the education level of the respondents had a negative impact ( $B = -7.189$  and  $p$ -value = 0.032), while the other 13 variables did exert and influence and were not considered to be significant.

**Table 5.** Relationships among variables.

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Religion	0.368	0.482	0.581	1	0.446	1.444	0.561	3.717
Marital status	0.607	0.278	4.779	1	0.029	1.834	1.065	3.160
Ethnic	0.129	0.121	1.147	1	0.284	1.138	0.898	1.443
Profession	0.067	0.058	1.310	1	0.252	1.069	0.954	1.198
Education level	-0.748	0.353	4.488	1	0.034	0.473	0.237	0.946
Equality when scarcity of job	-0.645	0.360	3.219	1	0.073	0.525	0.259	1.061
Equality on woman capacity for politic	0.567	0.328	2.976	1	0.085	1.762	0.926	3.355
Believe about equal education for all	-0.464	0.440	1.114	1	0.291	0.629	0.266	1.488
Believe about outside work for woman	-0.537	0.317	2.867	1	0.090	0.585	0.314	1.088
Attitude/practices on the amount of money accessible to woman	0.012	0.315	0.001	1	0.970	1.012	0.546	1.876
Attitude towards a woman household duty	7.189	1.059	46.107	1	<0.001	1324.130	166.265	10545.338
Equality on woman leadership position	0.466	0.312	2.226	1	0.136	1.593	0.864	2.938
Equality on Man having more resource than woman	-0.409	0.348	1.384	1	0.239	0.664	0.336	1.313
Equality on the presence of father for child education	-0.500	0.536	0.872	1	0.350	0.606	0.212	1.733
Believe on the choice of clothes to wear for a woman	0.522	0.371	1.986	1	0.159	1.686	0.815	3.485
Constant	-11.805	2.575	21.023	1	<0.001	0.000		

The qualitative data that were elicited provided more in-depth insight into the respondents' perceptions regarding "women having more resources than men". The respondents argued that, when women had more money than the men in their lives, they would try to be more dominant and would end up breaking up the household unity. This finding explains the persisting fear among both men and women that, if a woman possesses more resources than a man, it will inevi-

tably lead to the breakdown of domestic harmony, which does not necessarily happen when the men have more money than the women in their lives.

The respondents exhibited a clear absence of egalitarianism in another aspect, namely the power of men's decisions over women. If men's decisions are more powerful and dominant than those of women, it results in demonstrations of gender inequality, as demonstrated by the following condensed statements by the respondents:

*"It is the man who ultimately decides."*

*"To be a man is to be tough in your decisions."*

*"The man must apply his responsibility as a man."*

*"He [the man] cannot manifest any incompetence in the home."*

*"[The man] must not be cowardly."*

*"The man is the man; that's our culture...".*

In rural areas, the respondents confirmed a positive change in gender egalitarianism, which could have been due to the change from traditionalism to modernity globally. However, the respondents expressed some issues regarding this change, as was expressed aptly by one respondent:

*"In rural communities, women have equal capabilities to men; nevertheless, their lack of confidence presents a significant obstacle. In general, the majority of our female population exhibits a lack of self-assurance and confidence in their abilities. Moreover, the lack of opportunity for rural women stems from societal customs and religious restrictions."*

Regarding the respondents' attitudes towards women working outside the home, it was clear that the perceptions varied among households. However, there was a prevailing belief that was summarized pertinently by one participant who said: "When a woman joins the workforce, she may become tempted by others and consequently engage in romantic relationships outside of her partnership". A finding by [Hornsby-Gutting \(2009\)](#) supports this result. According to the latter author, historical circumstances have had a substantial influence on the development of gender performances, norms, and relations, and she asserts that individuals' perceptions of gender roles and equality have been influenced by persistent traditional and cultural norms. The corroborative finding of this notion by the current study thus not only reflects a heightened recognition of the significance of gender equality in the study area, but it should also prompt ongoing initiatives to explore and advocate for gender egalitarianism in South Kivu Province. [Lyness and Judiesch \(2014\)](#) argue that societal gender stereotypes play a role in shaping perceptions about women's work-life and that intervention policies and practices should be implemented to discourage gender stereotypes. This is significant considering that cultural gender egalitarianism moderates gender disparities and impacts academic performance, perceptions of work-life balance, career interest, and personal preferences in choosing a partner ([Lyness & Judiesch, 2014](#); [Kimmo, Marie, & Vartanova, 2020](#)).

## 5. Conclusion

Numerous studies have examined the prevalence and nature of gender inequality in a variety of sectors of the South Kivu Province, but the researcher deemed it necessary to evaluate the societal factors that either diminish or perpetuate gender inequality in this region. It was envisaged that the exploration of gender egalitarianism within the cultural, social, economic, and political spheres in the South Kivu region in the DRC would have the potential to enrich existing literature in this field. The findings suggest a shift towards greater gender egalitarianism in the domains of household resource management, opportunities for women to work outside the home, and recognition of women in leadership positions. Nonetheless, it is evident that there is a tendency to maintain a low level of egalitarianism in certain aspects of the economic, political, cultural, and societal lives of South Kivu residents. This is most evident in the persistent primacy given to men's decision-making power and the perception of a negative influence of women on family harmony should they have more financial means than the men in their lives.

The findings of this research offer valuable insight into South Kivu society's attitudes regarding gender in/equality in this province as it highlights areas of robust egalitarian support as well as areas that require attention. The findings reveal associations of varying strengths and degrees of significance between gender, religion, marital status, ethnicity, profession, education, and gender egalitarianism in the economic, political, and cultural spheres as well as in societal norms. A key finding is the significance of education in fostering gender equality while the findings also emphasize the necessity to address cultural obstacles that perpetuate a low level of egalitarian gender attitudes.

In light of these findings, this paper suggests the implementation of policies and interventions that will foster gender egalitarianism, particularly as this will enhance gender equality in the economic, political, societal, and lifestyle spheres of the population in the South-Kivu Province. The emphasis of these measures should be on the eradication of poverty in both rural and urban areas.

It was not the intention of this study to generalize the results to the entire study population, and it is acknowledged that there could be other underlying variables that need to be explored to establish the causality and directionality of the observed associations. Furthermore, the study did only a preliminary examination, which means that additional statistical testing is required to establish more definitive conclusions. However, the findings of this research illuminate a primary understanding of gender egalitarianism in South Kivu Province, and they can be utilized to inform better targeted and more effective gender equity policies and intervention strategies to curb gender inequality in the study area.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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## Appendix

- Questionnaire English version at <https://ee.kobotoolbox.org/x/bW0ywU5n>.
- Declaration of Proof-reading.