Kinship systems and women's power: a review of the literature and their effect on children outcomes in Malawi.

Marinella Boccia
Fernanda Mazzotta
Annalisa Papaccio
Lavinia Parisi

Abstract

Kinship systems are social organizations based on family ties defining the group of people to whom the individual is linked. Since these systems affect children's education, gender discrimination, and female power within the family, they become more remarkable in developing countries. This paper aims to describe the implication of women power on children education in a particular developing country (i.e. Malawi) in which kinship systems are strongly affecting the socio-economical life. It considers the effect of kinship systems (i.e., whether the family lives in matrilineal or patrilineal communities) first providing a detailed description of the kinship system's legal framework in Malawi and its connection to household decision making and then examining the main literature on the issue.

1. Introduction

The literature, focusing on the effect of intra-household decision-making power in developing countries, has been shown that the gender of the person responsible for household finances affects the way the money is spent (Attanasio and Lechene 2002; Doss 2006; Schady and Rosero 2008). In particular, when women have more bargaining power within the family, children's needs are more likely to be satisfied (Smith et al. 2003). The standard theoretical model utilized to analyse household decision making is Becker's altruist model (Lundberg and Pollak 1994). Becker's model, defined as the unitary model, assumes that a family acts as a single decision-maker with one aggregated utility function and a common budget constraint (Becker 1981). An increasingly common alternative to the unitary approach for studying household behaviour is the "collective" approach, formalized by means of bargaining models, according to which household members with specific (and generally different) preferences make Pareto-efficient decisions (Chiappori 1992; Chiappori 1997). Household demand is the result of a cooperative process, and the allocation of resources within the household depends on the members' respective "weights". The weights, known as Pareto weights, can be thought of as representing the respective power of each member over the outcome of the household decisions. The household maximizes a function that is a weighted sum of all members' utility functions, subject to their household's total budget constraint (Pollak 2005; Browning et al. 2006; Basu 2006). Some other authors stress the importance of distribution factors in affecting the balance of power (see also Mazzotta et al. 2019 on the collective approach and distribution factors).

Concerning education, authors have analysed household decision making regarding investments in the education of boys and girls by means of a "unitary" model of the household such that the preferences of the mother and father are identical (Glick and Sahn 2010). Others authors, via a collective approach, observe that if the husband and the wife assign the same weight to the child in their utility function, a change in bargaining power that favours the woman does not imply a higher weight of the children in equilibrium. However, if the wife assigns a higher weight to the children than the husband does, this implies that an increase in the wife's bargaining power also increases the part of income devoted to the children (Ringdal and Hoem Sjursen 2017).

According to UNESCO (UIS & UNICEF 2015), there has been a decline in the number of children out of school worldwide, but the process that increases children's enrolment in education in developing countries has dramatically slowed since 2007. Furthermore, in these countries, not only is the literacy rate sharply lower than the rate in developed countries, but gender inequalities still prevail in many aspects and may directly affect important outcomes, such as children's education (Unesco 2014). As Williams (1992) points out, *"Education enables women to contribute to the national and family economies, on a level at or exceeding the contributions of men"*.

Children's education, gender discrimination, and female power within the family are in this way related to each other. In addition, in developing countries and specifically in the African context, these topics become more interesting if their evaluation also relies on the kinship system.

Kinship systems determine the group of people to whom the individual is linked. This membership also implies several social obligations (Radcliffe-Brown 1950). An important element of a kinship system is the determination of descent. In unilineal descent systems, kin is defined using only one of the two parents (Fox 1934).

More specifically, in Central Africa, matrilineal kinship is dominant, which means that female family members determine membership and inheritance. A difference between matrilineal and patrilineal systems is that in patrilineal systems, individuals are part of the father set, and inheritance is passed to the children of the male group; the opposite is true for matrilineal systems in the sense that inheritance is restricted to the children of the female members of the group. It is important to note that the two systems are not symmetric; this means that in patrilineal systems, a wife is incorporated into the lineage of her husband, while in matrilineal systems, both maintain strong allegiances with their own (different) natal families (Mtika and Doctor 2002).

This paper describes the literature concerning the effect of an increase in women's power on intra-household decision making when parents have to choose the level of their private consumption and the level of education of their children. In other words, the paper seeks to examine whether the literature has found that enhancing women's decision-making power in the household increases children outcomes. Among those outcomes, we focus on the probability that children are sent to school, in the first place, their level of education and children's gender differences (daughters vs sons) (Lowes 2021; Lowes 2019). We also take

into account the effect of different forms of heritage systems present in countries such as Angola, Republic of Congo, DRC, Gabon, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia (i.e., matrilineal vs. patrilineal kinship). The paper first describes kinship systems legal framework and its connection to household decision making and then the main literature on the issue. Some conclusions are given in the final section.

2. The case study of Malawi

Among the developing countries in Africa, we concentrate our attention on Malawi and specifically to children's education. Malawi, is a country where the literacy rate is very low (62% for the total adult, that is Malawi is one of the last country for literacy rate, see Figure 1). Moreover, when considering women's decision power within the family[1] as one of the indicators of women's empowerment, we find greater differences between men and women in Malawi compared to the other available countries (see Figure 2).
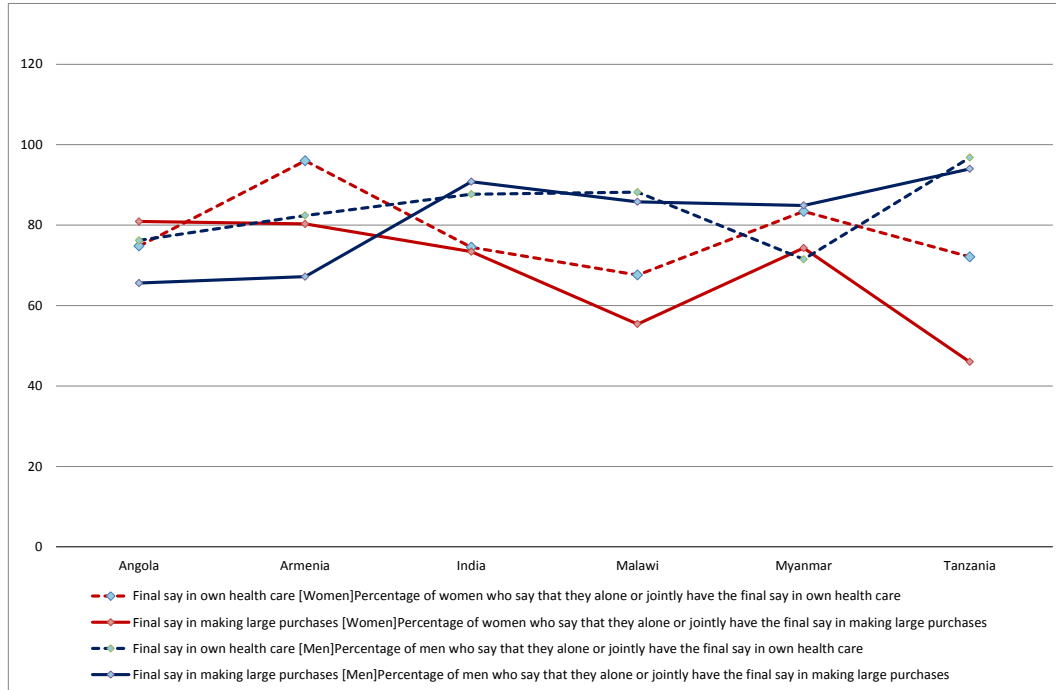
Figure 1: Literacy rate, adult total (% of people ages 15 and above) (2015)
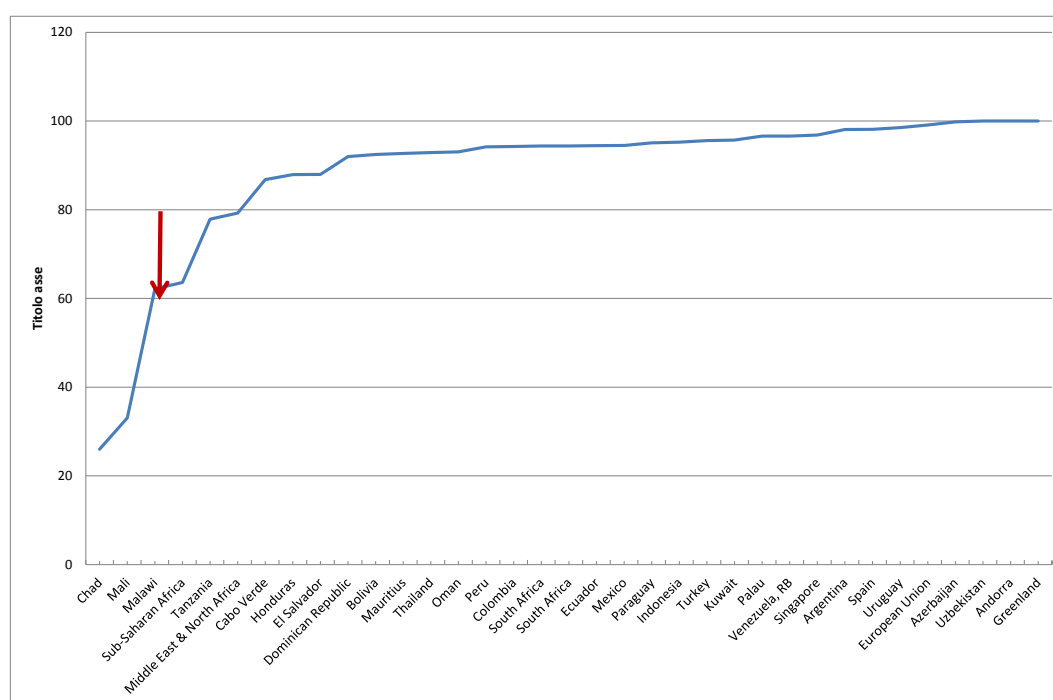
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, from https://databank.worldbank.org/

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[1] In particular, the variable considered in Figure 2 shows, separatley for men and women who has the final say on decision for health and large purchases

Figure 2: Decision Making, Final Say, (2015-2016)

Source: Demographic household survey, from https://www.statcompiler.com

Consequently, we consider Malawi as an important case of study not only for the availability of data but also for its intrinsic characteristics. Malawi is also a contradictory country: on one side, it is often defined by both locals, visitors and tourists as *"The Warm Heart of Africa"*, because of its friendly, welcoming and optimistic spirit with its 67% of the population under the age of 25 and 50% of the population under the age of 15 (CIA Central Intelligence 2021), it is a promising country in term of economic growth and development.

On the other side, Malawi is one of the poorest places on earth (poverty index 50.7 in 2010, World bank data; Figure 3), is ranked 139 out of 144 for Global Competitive Index (2017–2018) and 170 out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index (Figure 4) (United Nations Development 2015), with also the large number of children living in poverty. Third, Malawi has been targeted in recent years with many programmes aimed to improve children

and adult population conditions. Since when women are supported and empowered their families are healthier, more children go to school, agricultural productivity improves and income increases. [2]

Figure 3 Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of population) (2010)

Source: World Bank from https://databank.worldbank.org/

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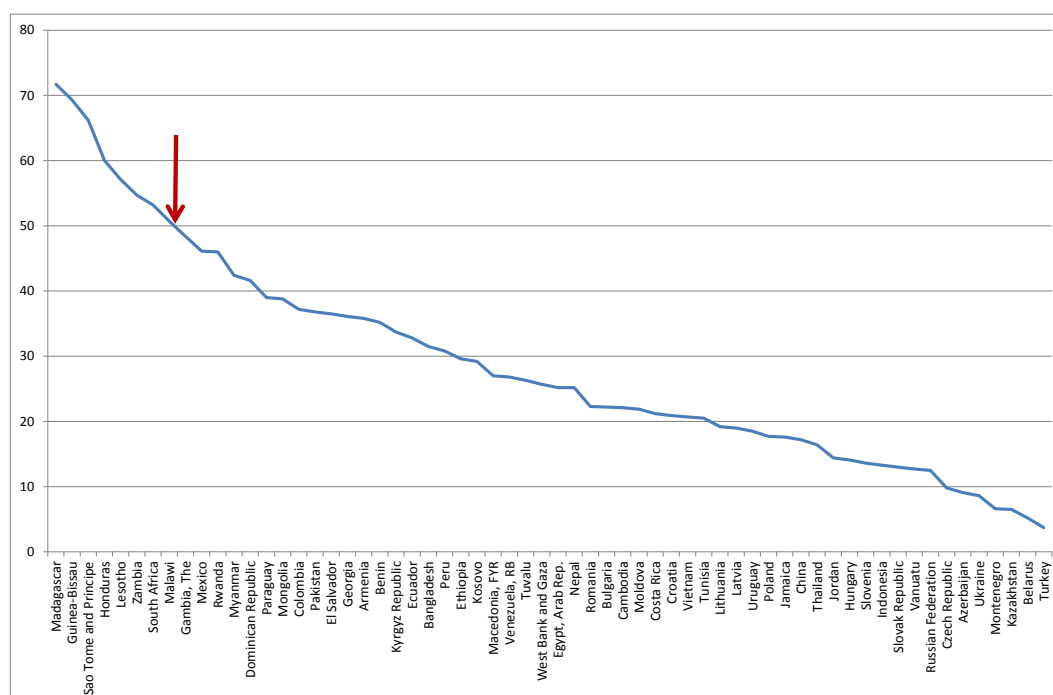
[2] Among them, the most important are: the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE); the Hunger Project's programs, that built a Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) to identify which practices and interventions offer the highest return on investment for women and their futures and the Girls Club, a female youth empowerment program directed at primary and secondary school girls implemented by Determined to Developed institution.

Figure 4 Global Competitiveness Index – 2017-2018
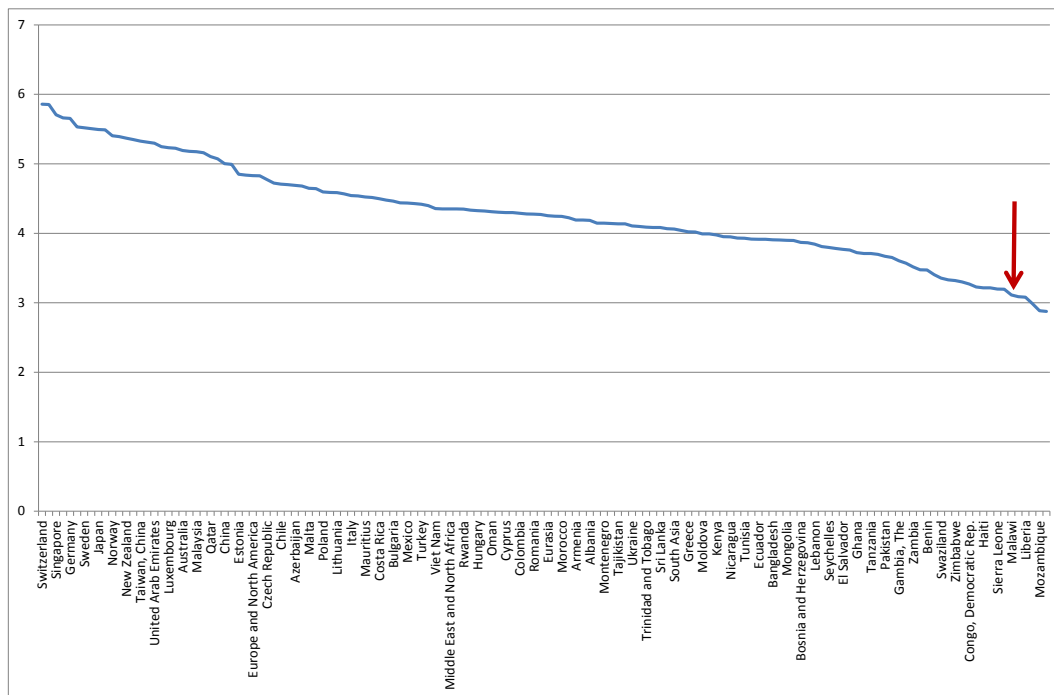
Source: Global Forum from http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-index-2017-2018/

2.1. Kinship systems

In Malawi, discriminatory practices related to women are reinforced by the ownership structure (Ngwira 2013; Berge et al. 2014; CEDAW 2015). In fact, men usually decide about customary land and property rights (WLSA-Malawi and GI-ESCR 2014); moreover, the differences between women and men in terms of the access, control and ownership of customary lands allow men to have more power (Kathewera Banda et al. 2011).

Each district in Malawi is composed of villages. The village is mainly composed of *mafuko* (Matrilineal relatives), *akamwini* (son in law), *akamwana* (daughter in law) and other people who are not related to the rest of the villagers by blood or marriage as the strangers who occupy land in the village with the consent of the village headman and live as co-villagers. The main social group in the village is the *fuko* which consists of all blood relations who

trace descent through a female line to a first or common ancestress[3]. Each *fuko* is subject to the control of a *kholo* (the oldest living ancestress of matrilineal relatives, Mwambene 2005) that obtains land for use of members of the *fuko*, and exercises general control over such land. On her death, her name and position in the social structure of the matrilineage are inherited by her eldest granddaughter.

Secondly, there is *mbumba* that is composed by all members of the matrilineage with the exception of the *kholo*. Each *mbumba* is subject to the control of its oldest male member, called *nkhoswe wamkulu*. Usually, the *nkhoswe* is the wife's brother. The functions and obligations of the *nkhoswe wamkulu* are similar to those of *kholo* as stated above, although the former has to consult the *kholo* in important matters like marriage and divorce.

Thirdly, there is *banja*. This social group is the basic family unit and is composed of a man and his family, together with their children, if any. The group is subject to the authority and control of the husband. As head of the family, the husband is responsible for providing food and shelter for members.

Even though the husband controls his family, the general welfare of the *banja* is in the hands of the *nkhoswe*; the eldest *nkhoswe* takes the leadership role. Because of this, some scholars have argued that matriliny is a patriarchal system which traces lineage through the female kin and enforces land and labour rights and obligations on that basis. In the absence of the wife's brothers, an elder sister or some other senior relative from the maternal line acts as the *nkhoswe* over their *mbumba*. It should be noted that in matrilineal customary law, a female has a chance of being a *nkhoswe* whilst as in the patrilineal customary law, as will be shown later in the discussion, it is always the males who take the leadership roles. The responsibility of the *nkhoswe* include: arranging marriages; ensuring that the *mbumba* have access to adequate land and other resources; and overseeing succession and inheritance rights. He (wife's brother) is also responsible for the general welfare of his sister and her children. Fathers/husbands play a minimal role in these responsibilities. They are side lined in all decision making, including control of what they produce from the gardens. These are gardens that were allotted to them by their wife's *nkhoswe*. As a man, a husband's status is achieved through his *mbumba* (Mwambene 2005). Lineage is traced through the woman. Inheritance

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[3] Blood relations include adulterine children and children of unmarried women.

of property passes through the female line. In addition, women under the matrilineal system have custodial ownership of land. It should also be noted that in matrilineal systems, children 'belong' to the woman and remain under the guardianship of the wife's eldest brother. Differently from Ghana where the father remains responsible for food and education expenditures of his children (La Ferrara and Milazzo 2017). A woman's child inherits from her brother's property. Upon the death of a man, the wife and children continue to live at the place of their abode and continue to use the land. When a woman dies, the husband returns to his home. Compared to patrilineal tribes, the woman has a much stronger position vis-à-vis her husband (Mwambene 2010)

The husband has no rights to the land. Note that this differs from other matrilineal societies studied in the literature (La Ferrara 2007), in fact in Ghana, an man's property is transferred to male members of his matrikin, the preferred order of inheritance being: the man's brother, the son of a sister, and the son of the deceased's mother's sister, but a man could dispose of his self-acquired property through *inter-vivos* gifts, sales or by writing a will before death, but this practice could only entail a limited portion of land and required formal approval by the matrikin.

We conclude that about social organization the matrilineal systems attaches considerable importance to women as the reproducers of the lineage. "Mother-right" ensures for women the right, even in marriage, to remain united with their own kin, and to control offspring of the marriage. It also offers them the right to protection by her *nkhoswe* and the right to inherit land from her mother. On the other hand, the brothers and maternal uncles of the wife are regarded as the heads of the family. Village leaders are generally chosen from amongst them. Similar to what happens in the patrilineal system, we see that in matrilineal societies, men are also leaders.

2.2 Marriage system

There are two main types of marriage customs in Malawi: matrilineal and patrilineal. Matrilineal practice can be divided into *chikamwini* and *chitengwa*. In c*hikamwini* marriages, the man moves to the wife's village, and lineage is "through the woman", while in *chitengwa* marriages, the woman moves to the man's village and, as we expect, the children "follow the woman's lineage" (Mwambene 2010; Ngwira 2013; Mwambene 2005). More specifically, in the *chikamwini,* the spouse residence is matrilocal. The husband is shown a piece of land on

which to build the matrimonial home; the family also provides a piece of land to the newlywed couple to be used for the cultivation of crops. All the rights with respect to such land are exercisable only with the consent of the wife's *kholo* (Mwambene 2005) *Chikamwini* marriages are more frequent in districts where the land is very scarce because a man may not be able to take his wife to his home and obtain land for cultivation because the little land available would be given to his married sisters according to custom. In a matrilineal household, the woman traditionally receives land from her mother when she marries, which she keeps if the couple divorce (Berge et al. 2014; Peters 2010; Davison 1997).

The c*hikamwini* marriage disadvantages husbands; their rights are compromised in their "new" family: the brothers and maternal uncles of the wife (concerned with their sister's interests) are considered the heads of the family.

In *chitengwa* marriages, the above rules also apply. There are, however, points of difference. In *chitengwa* (matrilineal patrilocal) marriages, the woman goes to live in the man's village, but the children belong to the woman's lineage. Upon the death of the husband, the widow and children return to the widow's village of origin. Therefore, although matrilineal to a large extent, it is similar to the patrilineal *lobola* system in other respects. Moreover, the land assigned to a wife in her husband's village (*chitengwa*) is under the control and interest of the husband's *kholo*.

On the other hand, in patrilineal marriage systems the matrimonial residence is in the man's village. The wife leaves her village and resides in her husband's village. The man pays *lobola* to the wife's father or guardian. The payment of *lobola* establishes his right to take his wife and children to his own village, and signifies that the man owns all the property, and makes the children of the marriage legitimate.

It should also be noted that, whilst in matrilineal tribes descent is from the oldest brother of the wife, in a patrilineal system descent is also through males but from the husband's side. Daughters are expected to get married and live in their husbands' villages. Therefore, they cannot inherit property. Thus, some commentators have argued that the patrilocal nature of the marriage and the payment of *lobola* in patrilineal tribes place the man in a position to enjoy a superior status without any qualification. It should also be noted that, unlike in the matrilineal system where children belong to the wife and her kin, in the patrilineal system children of the family belong to the man and his kinsmen.

In patrilineal marriages, lineage is through the man, and the residence is in the man's village (Ngwira 2013). The husband has to offer the matrimonial house to his wife, and this house is

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located in the husband's village. As in the matrilineal system, where the rights of the land allotted to the newlywed couple are exercisable only with the consent of the wife's *kholo*, in the patrilineal system, land is also a joint communal possession, but even if the property rights belong to the new family and even though the family head is the legal owner of the estate, his ownership is burdened with what has been called personal rights of various types (e.g., maintenance and habitation). The wife is assigned a piece of land to be used for the cultivation of crops. All the rights with respect to such land are exercisable only with the consent of the husband's family (Mwambene 2005).

In patrilineal households, men receive land from their families on marriage and keep this land if the couple divorce, with the woman returning to her family. Divorce matters: Malawi has one of the highest divorce rates on the continent, with one in two marriages dissolving (Reniers 2003). As in Walther (2018), we can interpret descent as a measure of outside options, because of its most important role is in determining land inheritance at the time of marriage. Moreover, the descent is also an opportunity cost, if the mother intends to leave the land to the daughter she can have fewer incentives to send her to school. The same for the son (and father) in patrilineal.

2.3. Some considerations about divorce and women's power

The most common type of marriage in matrilineal societies is the one in which the couple (after marriage) lives in the women's place of origin (matrilineal-matrilocal or *chikamwini)*; thus, this condition allows wives to continue to use familial land. In this case, the inheritance of property is passed down the matrilineal line. The maternal uncle is traditionally the "key decision-maker" who has complete authority over the ownership of familial property. However, as asserted in the OECD (2019), even if women have ownership rights, men still control most of the decisions, as they are considered the head of the household (SALC 2013; CEDAW 2015). After divorce, these wives may have to relinquish their land to their maternal uncles, who are generally seen as the heads of the clan.

The couple's property is distributed impartially upon the end of a marriage. Moreover, after divorce, because his residence was with the wife's family, the husband has to leave. He is only authorized to "take out" doors, windows, and other valuable fixtures not affecting the house structure. The right to "take out" is given only if the husband installed the fixtures in

the first place (Roberts 1970, 200). Moreover, in some cases, the husband loses the house that he built.

For the rights over land assigned to one spouse by the family of the other by the marriage, they end upon divorce. The cultivated land remains the property of the female spouse when the male spouse leaves the village because he had no right to the land. The land belongs to the family of the wife or husband and does not belong to an individual.

Each spouse, after divorce, keeps all his or her personal belongings (livestock, gifts of a traditional kind received from the other spouse). It is possible to divide household property between spouses, the lesser share going to the spouse responsible for the divorce. However, there can be differences regarding the property after divorce in that sometimes the property is equally distributed between the spouses irrespective of who is at fault.

There are also differences according to marriage and divorce in terms of access to land, control over land and household resources (Kathewera Banda et al. 2011). In any case, women are generally subsistence farmers in both patrilineal and matrilineal societies. Divorced women have access to land because they live in their native villages. In contrast, divorced men go back to their native homes and receive land temporarily, but the general thinking is that they will go away and get married again (Kathewera Banda et al. 2011). In contrast, women are inclined to lose access to land "granted" by their maternal uncles—the heads of the clan.

Control over land implies the possibility of deciding about the use of land. Women's control over land depends on their marital status, family ties and the fertility of the land, but even though women own land and have greater access to it, the capacity of married women to make decisions about the use of land is somewhat limited. The husband is said to have a greater say on what should be planted on a piece of land and how the produce should be managed. In other words, a man remains the head of the family. Moreover, outside the family, the final decision about the transaction—about land—is granted by the brother or the uncle.

Regarding patrilineal societies, women are excluded from land ownership (except for women acting as a proxy for their children), and inheritance generally passes through sons or male relatives (Kathewera Banda et al. 2011; CEDAW 2015). Moreover, the woman moves to the domicile of her husband, losing rights to her familial land. Once divorced, a woman may immediately lose the rights to her husband's (or jointly held) land (Women's Legal Resource

Centre (WOLREC 2011). The husband has more control over the matrimonial property except for odd items of personal property.

Since residence in the patrilineal system is at the husband's family home, it has been noted by other scholars that the husband sometimes dissolves the customary marriage by simply expelling the wife from his family home or abandoning her (Seymour and Bekker 1989).

As expected (Seymour and Bekker 1989), men start more divorce actions than wives, and it is far more difficult for women than men to obtain a divorce in patrilineal systems. Differently from matrilineal marriage, where both spouses have the possibility of starting divorce actions, under patrilineal marriage, the wife has no possibility to decide without referring the matter to her guardian. In addition, a wife who moved to the husband's home is expected to return to her guardian's family home after the end of a marriage. However, differently from the matrilineal systems, where the husband has to offer the matrimonial house to the wife even after the divorce decree has been granted, in the patrilineal system, the wife is not entitled to accommodation by her erstwhile husband after the end of marriage.

Regarding access to land, women's access depends on their marital status (Kathewera Banda et al. 2011), and they have access to land through their husbands. With divorce, women lose their access to land. Moreover, when they return to their native homes, they have limited access to land because the "lobola" is paid, so they are not considered part of the family. However, if the husband is responsible for the divorce, the "lobola" remains with the woman's brothers, and the woman can have a place in her natal home. Furthermore, if women return to their natal home, their control over land is also limited because they cannot plant perennial crops, as also the case with widows who remain in their marital homes or even those who go back to their native homes because they are "women in transit" and will marry off again.

Women usually control the land (kitchen gardens) of their houses. These portions of land are used for growing beans, pumpkins, tomatoes, and other crops typically considered "feminine crops," which do not fetch much money on the market. The decisions about what to plant on the larger pieces of lands are made by the husband because this land is used for crops, such as tobacco, that would fetch more money. Married women do not have control over larger pieces of land in patrilineal societies.

Finally, as in matrilineal societies, men control household resources, such as cash crops including tobacco, sunflower and rice, and the money earned from selling products or other monetary proceeds from land.

Control and ownership of land do not necessarily translate into more household bargaining power for women. Instead, bargaining power is determined by other factors. Even in a matrilineal society where women own land, it has been found that it is still the man who makes crucial decisions in the household. This is the reason why we should also use other indicators to measure women's relative power as decision-makers within the family (Kathewera Banda et al. 2011).

Household property, obtained by husband and wife, constitutes matrimonial property with the exclusion of personal belongings. Under the matrilineal system, just like in the patrilineal system, land does not belong to an individual. It belongs to the family of a wife or husband respectively. If the marriage is dissolved, the land goes back to the owner, the family (Mwambene 2010). On the other hand, divorced women in matrilineal continue to enjoy control to use the land they have access to because the woman remains in her native village. In patrilineal societies, women lose control over land since they are women in transit and will marry off again (WOLREC 2011). The matrimonial property will be distributed equitably between the parties upon dissolution of marriage under matrilineal customs. It is not clear though if this practice is applied also in patrilineal families where the man has more control over matrimonial property.

3. Children outcomes: the education

In order to describe the level of education in Malawi, we make use of The Integrated Household Panel Survey (IHPS) for the years 2010, 2013 and 2016, which is a dataset provided by the Government of Malawi with the financial support of The World Bank. The Integrated Household Survey (IHS) program is a very rich and useful dataset especially in order to study trends in poverty, and socioeconomic and agricultural characteristics over time. The 2016 Integrated Household Panel Survey (IHPS) was launched in April 2016 as part of the Malawi Fourth Integrated Household Survey fieldwork operation. The IHPS 2016 targeted 1,989 households that were interviewed in the IHPS 2013 and that could be traced back to half of the 204 enumeration areas that were originally sampled as part of the Third Integrated Household Survey (IHS3) 2010/11. The panel sample expanded each wave through the tracking of split-off individuals and the new households that they formed.

The survey covers several topics related to households (education, health, time use and labour, housing, food consumption, food security), agriculture (garden roster, plot roster, garden details, etc.), fisheries (fisheries calendar, fisheries labor, etc.) and community characteristics (economic activities, agriculture, changes, etc.).

The IHPS also collects information on types of marriages witnessed in the community[4] where individuals live. In particular, data collects 5 types of marriages in Malawi: matrilineal and neolocal, matrilineal and matrilocal (*chikamwini*), matrilineal and patrilocal (*chitengwa*), patrilineal and neolocal, patrilineal and patrilocal. From this information, we may distinguish between three matrilineal marriages and we group together the patrilineal ones (given smaller sample size for those two). Thus we end up with four type of marriages i.e. matrilineal-neolocal, matrilineal-matrilocal, matrilineal-patrilocal and patrilineal. Figure 5 maps the distribution of these four descendent systems between Malawi districts, we can see that the most common type of marriage in the Centre and South Malawi is the matrilineal whilst patrilineal marriage are more common in the North part of the country.

Malawi is a unique country because of its system of inheritance: around 60% of households are matrilineal and follow descent through the female line, so that land is passed from mother to daughter at the time of marriage, while the remainder are patrilineal and follow descent through the male line. Ethnic groups follow either matrilineal or patrilineal descent, and of the eleven main ethnic groups, six are matrilineal and five are patrilineal (Spring 1995) .

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[4] The question is at community level: Do individuals in this community trace their descent through their father, their mother, or are both kinds of descent traced? The possible replies are: Father, Mather, Both. The subsequent question is What are the common types of marriages witnessed in this community? The possible replies are: Matrilineal and neolocal, Matrilineal and matrilocal (*chikamwini*); Matrilineal and patrilocal (*chitengwa*); Patrilineal and neolocal, Patrilineal and patrilocal.

Figure 5: Types of customary marriages in Malawi Districts (2010)
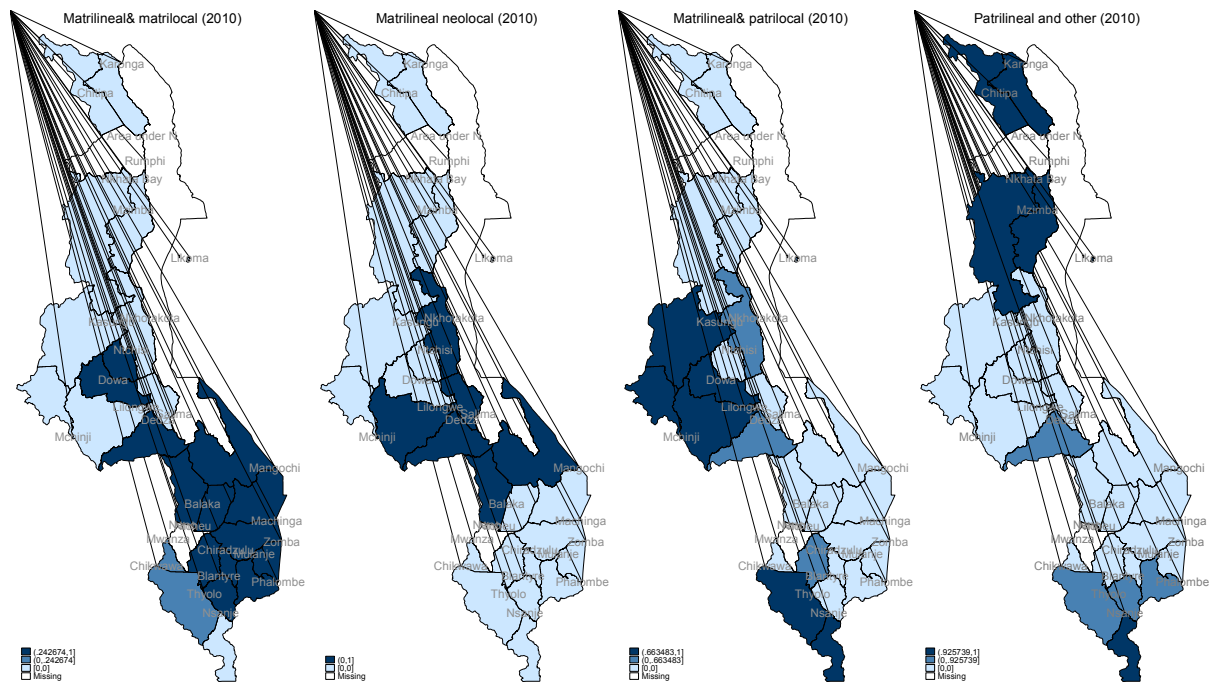
Source: Author's calculation on The Integrated Household Panel Survey (IHPS): 2010.

Table 1 report school attendance and years of schooling by kinship and gender for the three years under consideration (2010, 2013 and 2016).

With regards to school attendance, around 82% of children go to school, the percentage slightly increases during the time considered (2010-2016) as well as the years of schooling that reach an average of 4.7 years in 2016 (Table 1).

It is interesting to notice that, while years of schooling increase during the period considered, regardless of kinship system, gender and mother's land property, the pattern of school attendance follows a U-shaped curve for patrilineal communities and in families with mother landowners, while it increases regularly overtime for matrilineal communities.

Table 1 School attendance and Years of schooling by gender and customary marriage – full sample (2010, 2013, 2016)

School Attendance	Mean	Std. Error	95% Conf. Inter.		Years of schooling	Mean	Std. Error	95% Conf. Inter.	
2010	82%	0.0132	0.7978	0.8494	2010	3.9543	0.1170	3.7249	4.1837
2013	82%	0.0120	0.7957	0.8429	2013	4.3408	0.1072	4.1306	4.5510
2016	83%	0.0119	0.8040	0.8508	2016	4.6988	0.1133	4.4765	4.9210
Male					Male				
2010	82%	0.0166	0.7906	0.8558	2010	3.9079	0.1486	3.6164	4.1993
2013	83%	0.0148	0.7991	0.8571	2013	4.3893	0.1428	4.1092	4.6694
2016	83%	0.0159	0.7992	0.8616	2016	4.5719	0.1288	4.3193	4.8244
Female					Female				
2010	82%	0.0161	0.7924	0.8557	2010	4.0023	0.1462	3.7155	4.2890
2013	81%	0.0158	0.7792	0.8412	2013	4.2901	0.1385	4.0184	4.5618
2016	82%	0.0158	0.7929	0.8549	2016	4.8449	0.1573	4.5363	5.1535
Patrilineal					Patrilineal				
2010	89%	0.019	0.856	0.931	2010	3.756	0.206	3.353	4.159
2013	81%	0.026	0.758	0.861	2013	4.378	0.269	3.851	4.905
2016	86%	0.024	0.811	0.905	2016	4.910	0.271	4.377	5.442
Matrilineal					Matrilineal				
2010	79%	0.018	0.756	0.826	2010	3.773	0.145	3.489	4.058
2013	81%	0.014	0.781	0.838	2013	4.135	0.121	3.897	4.373
2016	84%	0.016	0.804	0.868	2016	4.523	0.134	4.261	4.786
Both					Both				
2010	85%	0.032	0.786	0.911	2010	5.519	0.430	4.676	6.362
2013	92%	0.022	0.879	0.964	2013	5.991	0.333	5.337	6.644
2016	80%	0.023	0.752	0.842	2016	4.942	0.253	4.445	5.438
By mother's property					By mother's property				
2010	84%	0.021	0.798	0.881	2010	3.517	0.206	3.112	3.922
2013	79%	0.022	0.747	0.832	2013	3.949	0.169	3.617	4.282
2016	82%	0.020	0.778	0.855	2016	4.261	0.197	3.875	4.646

Source: Author's calculation on The Integrated Household Panel Survey (IHPS): 2010-2013-2016.

Table 2 reports the distribution of school attendance and average of years of schooling by gender, customary marriage and age of children. In our sample around 82% of children go to school, while the average years of schooling is 4.4. There are differences when we look at children age: around 90% of children aged 6-13 years attend school, while when we look at

older children (aged 14-24) the percentage of those attending school decrease to around 70%. Moreover, we do not find a significant difference between sons and daughters neither in school attendance nor in the average years of schooling.

Table 2 School attendance and years of schooling by kinship, marriage and age of children (al the sample 2010-2016)

| School Attendance	Mean	Std. Error	95% Conf. Inter.		Years of schooling	Mean	Std. Error	95% Conf. Inter.	
All children 6-24					All children 6-24				
Matrilineal Neolocal	80.90%	0.024	0.7625	0.8565	Matrilineal Neolocal	5.3096	0.2677	4.7845	5.8347
Matrilineal Matrilocal	80.50%	0.011	0.7837	0.827	Matrilineal Matrilocal	4.3239	0.1006	4.1266	4.5211
Matrilineal Patrilocal	83.30%	0.0132	0.8071	0.8588	Matrilineal Patrilocal	4.1815	0.1171	3.9517	4.4112
Patrilineal	90.00%	0.0147	0.8711	0.9288	Patrilineal	4.6448	0.1841	4.2837	5.0059
Children 6-13					Children 6-13				
Matrilineal Neolocal	91.00%	0.0237	0.8634	0.9563	Matrilineal Neolocal	3.4651	0.1433	3.1841	3.7461
Matrilineal Matrilocal	88.00%	0.0101	0.8605	0.9002	Matrilineal Matrilocal	2.8202	0.0537	2.715	2.9255
Matrilineal Patrilocal	91.80%	0.0115	0.8953	0.9403	Matrilineal Patrilocal	2.836	0.0667	2.7052	2.9668
Patrilineal	96.30%	0.013	0.9377	0.9886	Patrilineal	3.2173	0.123	2.976	3.4587
Children 14-24					Children 14-24				
Matrilineal Neolocal	66.90%	0.0461	0.5781	0.7591	Matrilineal Neolocal	8.8331	0.3147	8.2154	9.4509
Matrilineal Matrilocal	68.20%	0.0193	0.6445	0.7201	Matrilineal Matrilocal	7.5084	0.1429	7.2279	7.7889
Matrilineal Patrilocal	68.20%	0.0249	0.6326	0.7305	Matrilineal Patrilocal	7.4162	0.1779	7.0669	7.7655
Patrilineal	79.10%	0.0314	0.7295	0.8526	Patrilineal	7.6374	0.2751	7.0973	8.1775

Source: Author's calculation on The Integrated Household Panel Survey (IHPS): 2010-2013-2016.

Figures 6-8 reports the distribution of school attendance and years of schooling by customary marriage distinguishing among age of children (respectively all children – Fig. 6, children aged 6-13 years – Fig. 7 and children aged 14-24 – Fig.8). All the figures also show the statistical differences tests. It is interesting to notice that also distinguishing by customary marriage, there are not statistically significance difference between son and daughter for the school attendance.

With regard of years of schooling in patrilineal systems, men are advantaged for the age 6-13, whilst daughters, aged 14-24 years, are favourite in educational level in matrilineal neolocal,

daughter aged 6-13 year are advantaged in matrilineal matrilocal. Therefore we can say that there is a preference for the daughter in terms of years of schooling in the matrilineal matrilocal for younger and neolocal for older daughter.

**Figure 6: School Attendance and Years of schooling by gender and customary marriage (full sample aged 6-24 years)**
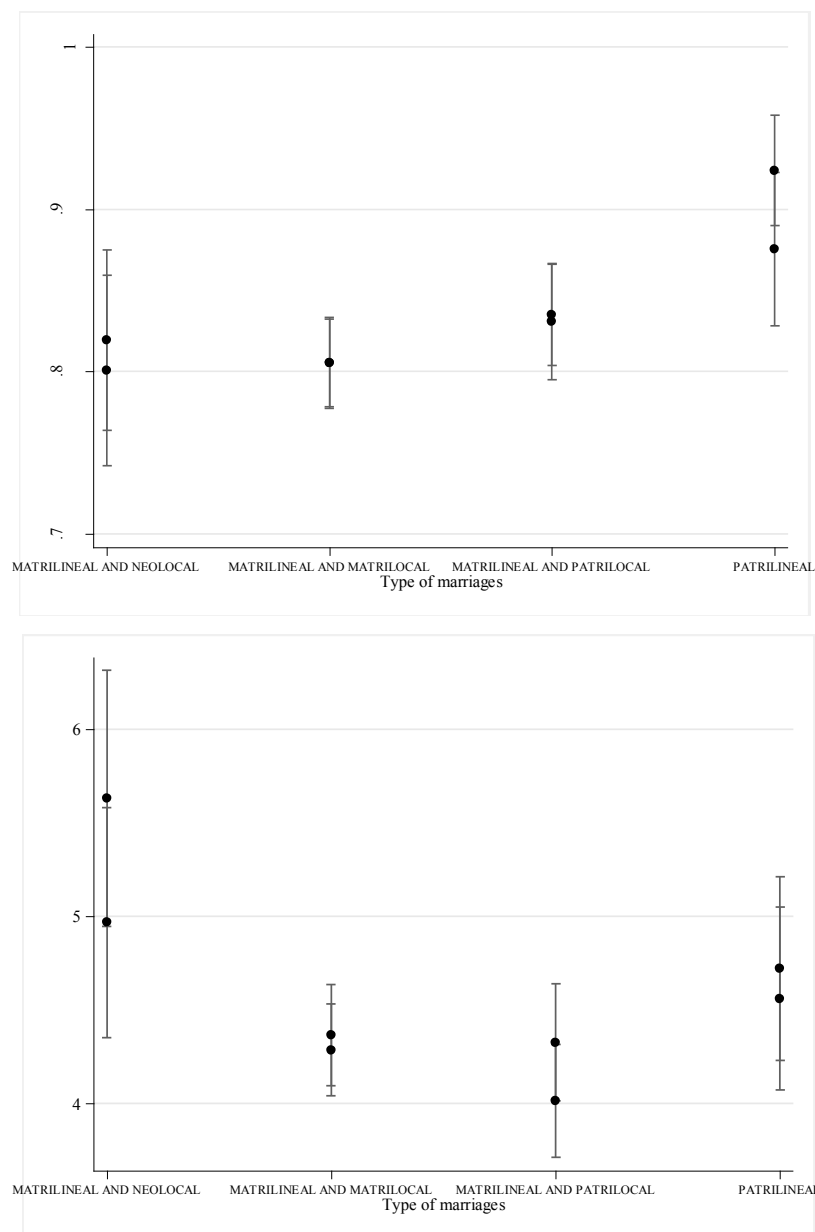
Source: Author's calculation on The Integrated Household Panel Survey (IHPS): 2010-2013-2016.

Figure 7: School Attendance and Years of schooling by gender and customary marriage (sample aged 6-13 years)
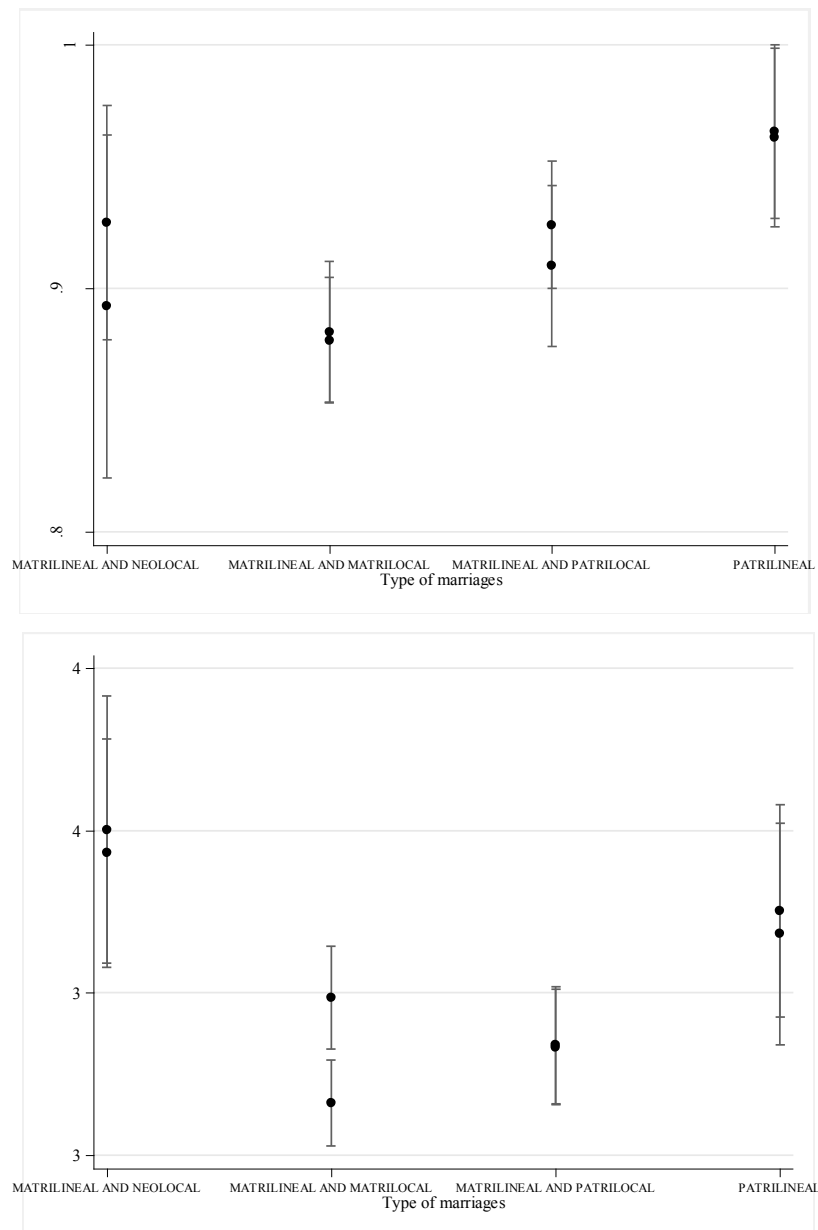
Source: Author's calculation on The Integrated Household Panel Survey (IHPS): 2010-2013-2016.

Figure 8: School Attendance and Years of schooling by gender and customary marriage (sample aged 14-24 years)
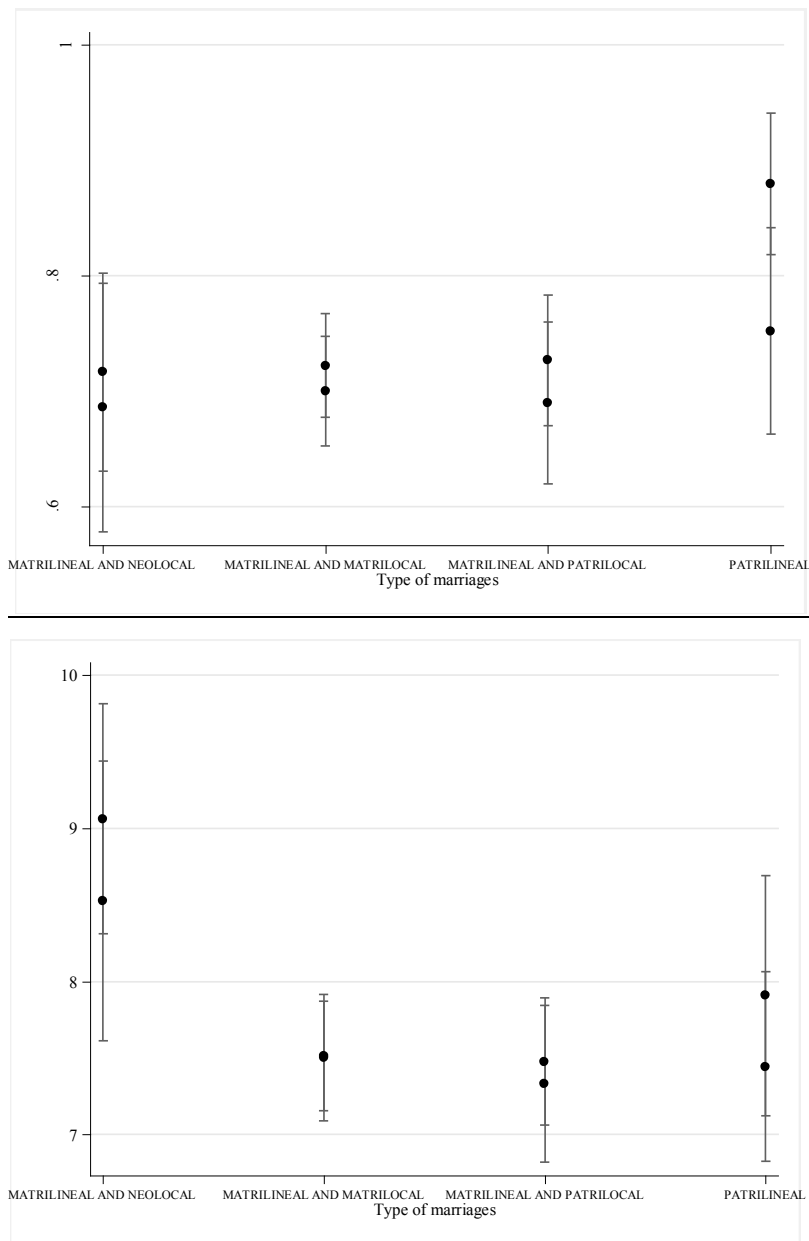
Source: Author's calculation on The Integrated Household Panel Survey (IHPS): 2010-2013-2016.

Table 3 reports the distribution of school attendance distinguishing whether the family is poor or not. We can observe that while for younger children the school attendance is always high, regardless of the poverty status, 87.1% and 90.8% respectively for poor and not poor families; for older children, the school attendance is significantly different across poverty

status: 70.8% vs. 59.9% respectively). Thus for older children, it seems that there is an income effect, while for younger the choice of going or not to school derive only from a comparison between benefits and cost. The primary school in Malawi is directly and indirectly (with food distribution) supported and we can also assume that, given the low difficulty or effort to devote for study, the net price of primary education is low. On the contrary., about years of schooling poverty conditions influence young and older children and the parents make a choice and decide to enrol to school not all the children.

Table 3 School attendance and years of schooling distinguishing whether family is poor or not

School Attendance	Mean	Std. Error	95% Conf. Inter.		Years of schooling	Mean	Std. Error	95% Conf. Inter.	
All Children 6-24					All Children 6-24				
Not poor	83.30%	0.0079	0.8172	0.848	Not poor	4.4433	0.0846	4.2773	4.6093
Poor	77.20%	0.022	0.7288	0.8149	Poor	3.5055	0.1567	3.1982	3.8129
Children 6-13					Children 6-13				
Not poor	90.78%	0.0073176	0.893459	0.922167	Not poor	2.7218	0.0470	2.6296	2.8140
Poor	87.10%	0.02	0.8318	0.9103	Poor	2.3180	0.0937	2.1341	2.5018
Children 14-24					Children 14-24				
Not poor	70.83%	0.0144833	0.679883	0.736728	Not poor	7.2888	0.1226	7.0482	7.5293
Poor	59.91%	0.0380261	0.524438	0.673686	Poor	5.5744	0.2509	5.0820	6.0668

Source: Author's calculation on The Integrated Household Panel Survey (IHPS): 2010-2013-2016.

4.Women's power within the family in developing country and children outcomes: a literature review

The analysis of intra-household decision-making power in developing countries has been the subject of several studies. Many works discover that the gender of the person responsible for household finances have an important role in determining the way in which the money is spent (Attanasio and Lechene 2002; Doss 2006; Schady and Rosero 2008); when women have more bargaining power within the family, children's needs are more likely to be satisfied (Smith et al. 2003).

Two factors play a crucial role in shaping parental preferences towards children outcomes.

The first one is the kinship structure, i.e., the ways in which marriages are socially constructed. As we have seen before, kinship is gauged in many different ways across nations and cultures in the world. In most cases, descent is traced through a single line that is either through the mother or through the father. The two basic forms of unilineal descent are patrilineal and matrilineal (La Ferrara and Milazzo 2017). As we have seen, particularly interesting is the case of Malawi, where marriages are arranged according to either matrilineal (with some peculiarities among matrilineal systems) or patrilineal traditions (The Malawi National Commission on Women in Development, 1993), and this, in general, may have implications on children outcomes (Zvonkovic et al. 1996). In Malawi, approximately 60% of households are matrilineal and follow descent through the female line; moreover, the country has one of the highest divorce rates on the continent, with one in two marriages dissolving (Reniers 2003). Descent is a measure of the outside options (Walther 2018) because it determines land inheritance at the time of marriage and a measure of the opportunity cost given that if the mother leaves the land to the daughter, she may have less incentive to send her to school (the same happens for sons in patrilineal communities). Studies have found that girls' schooling is not a valuable investment in patrilineal societies because girls are expected to move upon marriage (Odaga and Heneveld 1995); in fact, Ngwira (2013) defines daughters as "transient" in patrilineal societies in Malawi. However, studies on matrilineal inheritance do not show a positive effect on girls' schooling (Quisumbing and Otsuka 2001). Matrilineal systems have, in light of this, been argued as detrimental to children's schooling because the father abandons all responsibility for children's future.

The second factor to consider when analysing female power within the family is household decision-making. It is a complex process that is equally important for women's empowerment. Several studies have analysed decision making in Malawi by focusing on specific subjects, such as agricultural (e.g., decision on tree planting), family planning (e.g., decision on use of contraceptive), health (e.g., decision on own health care), household purchases (e.g., decision to purchase goods), and relatives' visits. The Malawi Demographic

and Health Survey 2015-16[5], for instance, as we seen in Figure 2, provides questions to analyse the degree of women's participation in (1) their own health care, (2) major household purchases, and (3) visits to their own family or relatives. More than one-half of women participate in each of the household decisions. Almost half of them participate in all three decisions, while 15% participate in none of the three decisions. Moreover, since 2010, there has been an increase in the number of women who report participation in these three common household decisions. Women's decision making within the family has been found to increase with age, employment status, when living in an urban area, education and personal income (National Statistical Office (NSO) - Government of Malawi 2017). Additionally, studies have found that the heritage system affects intra-household decision making: in the patrilineal marriage tradition, husbands are expected to have more power, while wives should have comparatively more influence in a matrilineal marriage tradition (Meijer et al. 2015).

The analyses on intra-household decision making, focus also on the process that leads to decision-making power within the family. In this respect, Mbweza et al. (2008), using qualitative data on 30 couples in two districts of Malawi, examine the decision-making processes of husband and wife dyads in matrilineal and patrilineal marriage traditions. Most of the couples reported using a mix of final decision-making approaches: husband-dominated, wife-dominated, and shared. Women's decision making within the family is closely linked to positive outcomes for the family and society (Presser and Sen 2000). Women's participation in household decision making, measured by female income, has been found to increase the expenditure shares of boys' and girls' clothing (Attanasio and Lechene 2002; Rubalcava et al. 2009).

It has often been argued that in families in which women play an important role in decision-making, the proportion of family resources devoted to children is greater than that in families in which women play a less decisive role (Thomas 1990; Duraisamy and Malathy 1991; Bruce et al. 1995; Blumberg 1991). This notion of "maternal altruism" assumes that power in the hands of women will lead to better child outcomes (Mason 1986). The gender of the person in charge of managing household finances affects the way the money is spent (Attanasio and Lechene 2002; Doss 2006; Duflo 2003; Alderman et al. 1995; Schady and

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[5]Available at   http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/2792 (National Statistical Office (NSO) - Government of Malawi 2017).

Rosero 2008), and policy interventions, such as social grants to favour children, may be more likely to succeed when received by a woman (Smith et al. 2003).

Research on women's decision-making autonomy and children's outcomes find significant positive effects on child survival, nutrition, and health (Hossain et al. 2007; Shroff et al. 2009; Shroff et al. 2011; Brunson et al. 2009)

Desai and Johnson (2005) found in two Asian countries (Nepal and India), women's decision making authority improves height-for-age and reduces child mortality, even after controlling for education and wealth. Effects are the weakest in sub-Saharan Africa, with Latin America and the Caribbean falling in between. This suggests that more nuanced research on gender inequalities would incorporate historical and cultural factors that influence gender systems in different settings. Women in Asia and the Middle East are restricted by patriarchal controls that limit their physical mobility and ability to make independent decisions to a far greater degree than women in other cultures (Smith et al., 2003). Fantahun et al (2007) showed that combined efforts to improve women's involvement in household decision making, social capital and immunization may decrease the high child mortality in Ethiopia where the level of poverty is high and no appreciable trend in child mortality decline has been noted over the years.

It is also true that, in developing countries, gender inequalities still prevail in many aspects (World Bank 2018) and may directly affect important outcomes, such as childhood education (Jayachandran 2015).

Despite the increasing number of children attending school in Malawi, after primary school was made free in 1994, the quality of the educational system in Malawi decreased, and participation rate remains quite low (The World Bank 2015). Additionally, gender disparity in Malawi remains very high; however, education in general, and girls' primary education in particular, has had a positive impact on social developments (World Bank 2010).

Educational spending in Malawi is among the highest in Africa, regardless of the fact that Malawi has one of the world's most dramatic teacher shortages, affecting the quality of the education, and the fact that the education system has yet to improve literacy among young people (United Nations Development 2015).

Numerous studies have tried to disentangle the determinants of schooling in developing countries by focusing on individual and household characteristics that may indirectly affect children's outcomes (i.e., through parental preference) or directly and supply factors. Considering the indirect effects of individual and household characteristics, scholars focus on

parental preferences. These preferences may be shaped by the characteristics of the children; for instance, parents may prefer to send boys to school (Emerson and Souza 2007; Drèze and Sen 1998; Gong et al. 2005; Gandhi Kingdon 2002), or they may give special preference to children of the same gender as themselves (Alderman and King 1998). Parents may prefer to send children closely related to them (orphaned adolescents are less likely to attend school) (Nankhuni and Findeis 2003; Government of Malawi and World Bank 2007). Parental preferences are also affected by parental characteristics. For instance, female-headed households invest more in children's education compared to male-headed households (Government of Malawi and World Bank 2007). More highly educated parents may also place greater value on education and therefore more strongly favour children's education (Amin et al. 2011). Quisumbing (1994), analyses parental gender preference in inheritance decisions using family fixed effects estimates with interactions between gender of the child and parental endowments in five rice growing villages in the Philippines. The results indicate that, in level terms, daughters receive more education and total inheritance but less land but also parents exhibit preferential behaviour towards children of the same gender. Cross-national studies using data from Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and South Africa find that women's control over household resources reduce gender differences in children's education in Bangladesh but not in the other three countries (Quisumbing and Maluccio 1999). Fuller et al. (1995) find that in Botswana mothers were more likely to invest in their daughters than were fathers and tended to support their daughters' schooling more fairly in relation to their sons. Women with greater power to negotiate their preferences within the household may be better able to translate their preferences into outcomes, but their preferences may still be shaped by dominant community gender norms. In contexts with strong preferences for sons, or where women's social and financial well-being depends overly on sons, as it is typical in patrilineal settings, autonomy may have a more favourable effect for boys' outcomes (Eswaran 2002; Das Gupta 1987). Afoakwah, Deng and Onur (2018)) in a preliminary work for Ghana show that girls tend to benefit more from the mother's bargaining power compared to boys, which reflects, in part, the large matrilineal society in Ghana.

Luz and Agadjanian (2015), using data from a 2009 survey of rural women and their households in a patrilineal setting in southern Mozambique, show a positive effect of women's autonomy on the probability of being enrolled in primary school for daughters, but not for sons. They discuss their results as a positive relationship between women's autonomy and children's enrolment will be stronger for sons because in the prevailing patrilineal system

the real and perceived future returns of schooling are higher for boys than for girls and greater decision-making autonomy may help to realize the corresponding schooling preferences

Scholars also have been focusing on individual and household characteristics as affecting school attendance but the evidence is not unique. For example, poor households may also reduce investment in education (Huisman and Smits 2009; Jacoby and Skoufias 1997); female-headed households, which are on average poorer than male-headed counterparts in both rural and urban areas, may be induced to use child labour (Nankhuni and Findeis 2003) and thereby discourage school attendance. Employment in formal work may contribute to a greater understanding of the value of education, and it helps to provide greater financial security (Huisman and Smits 2009), thus improving children school attendance. Household size has contradictory effects. Having older siblings may reduce the opportunity cost of sending children to school because these children take responsibility for household chores (Chernichovsky 1985). However, a larger household size may exacerbate the workload and reduce school attendance. Income and parents' education levels are also important determinants of children's education in developing countries. Glick and Sahn (2000) find that girls' education increases with household income. The father's education level positively affects the education of both boys and girls, but the mother's education only significantly affects the daughter's education level. Furthermore, another variable of interest at the household level is represented by the polygamous union, which in sub-Saharan Africa is generally related to poverty, infant mortality, and HIV (Yerges et al. 2017). Polygamy in Malawi is characterized by regional patterns; it is highest in the northern region and lowest in the southern region. Compared with monogamous-marriage households, those in polygamous households were older, had been married longer, were more likely to have been previously married, had a greater number of living children, were more likely to have had a child who died, and were less likely to have at least a secondary education (Baschieri et al. 2013).

The last group of determinants is related to supply factors. Parents are more likely to send their child to a low-cost private school than a government school if their preferences indicate they value the quality of teaching (Dixon et al. 2017). The proximity of school to the household and the location within the community (Härmä 2011a; Härmä 2011b) have significant effects on school-related decisions and the school's reputation. The relationship between the school owners and parents will thus also have an effect on choice (Härmä 2011a; Härmä 2011b). Finally, children's education is one of the most important outcomes affected

by household decision making. Several studies have found that women's bargaining power (measured by income and education) is positively correlated with children's education (Buchmann and Hannum 2001; Lam and Schoeni 1993).

6. Conclusions

This work aimed to describe the link between the power of women and the education of children with a focus on Malawi, taking in account that kinship systems and marriage laws strongly affecting the socio-economical life.

The decisions to send children to school and to invest in education, in general, can be affected by the process behind family decision making and shaped by the power distribution in the couple. Furthermore, kinship descent systems determine the social obligations to a specific set of people to which a person is related (Radcliffe-Brown 1950).

The literature emphasizes that the power of women is fundamental for the education of children and, in many developing countries, gender inequality is an important cause of children's poor development, especially in the early years. But gender discrimination and women's conditions are the origins of women's limited autonomy and the simultaneous denial of their rights. When women have limited decision-making power, it negatively impacts their children's outcomes, especially survival, growth, and development (Plan International 2017). The importance of gender differences in children's education is due to the fact that gender inequalities, which prevail in many cases, may directly affect key outcomes such as children's education.

This paper may represent a starting point of on ongoing research that both from a theoretical and empirical point of view should try to highlight the positive and negative aspects of existing kinship and marriage systems in developing countries.

Literature results and our descriptive analysis showed that there is a preference for the daughters in terms of years of schooling in the matrilineal-matrilocal communities (where we found that the youngest is preferred) and matrilineal-neolocal communities (where we found that the oldest, 14-24 year old, is favourite). The hypothesis that, in matrilineal-matrilocal system, increasing female empowerment reduce gender discrimination is confirmed, This might also have positive effects on children's education and in turn may improve cognitive, social, and emotional skills influence lifelong educational achievement, health, and

wellbeing. Indeed, when young girls and boys are denied access to the opportunities, care, and services they need to thrive and develop to their full potential, it affects the rest of their lives. On the opposite, the combination between gender discrimination and preference for sons means that in most cases, young girls receive less nutrition, opportunities to play, and access to early education compared with young boys (Plan International 2017).

Literature results allow the policy makers and governments to take into account the positive effects of policies that have to be targeted considering explicitly the kinship systems to have some results in reducing inequality and improving education with positive consequences on the overall performance of countries. In particular, where women's power is already positively affecting children outcome (i.e. matrilineal communities) policies should focus on distributional issue to make available resource to a wide range of population. On the other hand, where women have not enough power (i.e. patrilineal societies) an action should be taken to improve the consideration of them within the society, affecting the cultural roots of gender differences.

James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey, a renowned Ghanaian educator and sociologist, during his talk campaigning for the inclusion of women in the Achimota College in Ghana (Ephson 1969), made popular this proverb: *"If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family (nation)"* (Suen 2013).

The proverb aims to emphasize that women are agents of development. This proverb points out the different outcomes related to the education of men and women in the sense that educated women have higher abilities to yield externalities—further benefits that encourage the development of their relatives and the nation as a whole. In contrast, men will deliver benefits from education to themselves alone. Thus, this view renders educated women as better developmental agents when compared to men (Suen 2013).

Studies agree that there is a need to increase female participation and empowerment in the developing countries and in Malawi, and one of the main avenues for accomplishing this goal is to improve women's decision-making power within the family.

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