In Sub-Saharan Africa, parental death is generally associated with adverse children’s outcomes. These outcomes include schooling, health, psychological well-being, sexual behavior, and marriage. Parental divorce, less frequently studied than parental death, can also affect family instability, and consequently, children’s outcomes. Studies indicate that some African countries have higher rates of divorce as well as increasing divorce rates. Although more marriages and in divorce than widowed, much is known about the outcomes of children from divorced marriages.

### Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between parental divorce and children’s outcomes in rural Malawi?
2. How does mother’s remarriage affect these outcomes?

### Data

The present study uses data from the 2006, 2008, and 2010 waves of the Malawi Longitudinal Study of Families and Health (MLSFH). Data are collected in three rural districts: Rumphi (Northern), Mchinji (Central), and Balaka (Southern).

### Methods

Longitudinal data methods, specifically random effects models, are used to examine the relationship between parents’ marriage status, parents’ marriage-mother’s remarriage status, and children’s schooling outcomes. Due to the multilevel nature of the data, wherein children are nested within mothers, I include random intercepts to control for the contribution of mother-level and child-level characteristics to the overall variance in schooling outcomes. Depending on the distribution of the outcome, I use either three-level linear or logistic random-intercept models.

Schooling outcomes include:
- Current school attendance
- Grades of schooling completed
- Schooling gap (restricted to in-school children aged 7-16 yrs)

Key predictor variables are:
- Parents’ marriage status
  - → Still married (ref)
  - → Divorced
- Parents’ marriage-Mother’s remarriage status
  - → Still married (ref)
  - → Divorced-Remarried
  - → Divorced-Unmarried

The following control variables are included in all models:
- Child-level:
  - educational attainment, wealth index
- Mother-level:
  - age, sex, child’s ethnicity, general health status, lives with mother

### Results

#### Parents’ Marriage & Mother’s Remarriage Status in 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Schooling Status</th>
<th>Odds Ratio (95% CI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Completed School</td>
<td>0.82 (0.72-0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced-Remarried</td>
<td>Completed School</td>
<td>0.88 (0.77-0.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced-Unmarried</td>
<td>Completed School</td>
<td>0.93 (0.82-1.06)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Random Effects Regression, Schooling Outcomes, by Parents’ Marriage Status, 2006-2010

### Conclusions

Younger children from divorced marriages have similar odds of school attendance as those from intact marriages, but have completed fewer grades of schooling and have a larger schooling gap. When I consider remarriage, children’s school performance, as measured by grades of schooling completed and schooling gap, appears to be affected. While children whose mothers remarried completed fewer grades of schooling and have a larger schooling gap, children whose mothers remarried completed similar grades of schooling and have a comparable schooling gap to children whose parents are still married.

Among older children, parental divorce is associated with lower school attendance, fewer grades of schooling completed, and a larger schooling gap. Children from divorced marriages, regardless of whether their mother remarried, have lower odds of school attendance. While children whose mothers remarried have completed, on average, fewer grades of schooling than those from intact marriages, their schooling gap is not significantly different. Children whose mothers did not remarried have completed similar grades of schooling and have a comparable schooling gap to children whose parents are still married.