Does parents’ presence matter?

A study on the welfare of migrants’ children and other children in Malawi not living with their parents

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Preface

This thesis has mainly been written in Zomba, Malawi, during my stay there January–December 2009. There are several persons I want to thank, not only for making this possible, but also for making it a valuable and enjoyable experience.

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Any misunderstandings, misprints and mistakes in this study are, of course, my responsibility alone.
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1. Introduction

In Malawi, four in ten children below 15 years do not live with both their parents. The HIV/AIDS epidemic has resulted in a large number of orphans, but there are also several other reasons why children do not live with both or any of their parents – like migration, parental divorce, polygamy or death due to other causes.

Governments, communities and development aid initiatives try to reach the most vulnerable children with different forms of support. For this support to be effective, it is important to know where the largest problems are and what they consist of.

Studies on vulnerable children in Malawi have so far concentrated mainly on the situation for orphans, and particularly the AIDS orphans. Children living apart from one or both of their parents for other reasons have not been subject to the same academic interest. These children are around three times as many as the children who have lost one or both parents due to HIV/AIDS.

Some of the children with absent parents are children left behind by migrants, a phenomenon that has drawn some attention over the last years. Whether parental migration is good for the child or not, is a controversial question. On one hand, parents are normally assumed to be the ones best able provide the love and care that a child needs. On the other hand, remittances from migration can enable a household to pay for a child’s education and health care, which is an advantage for the child. The situation for Malawian children left behind by migrants has not, as far as I have been able to confirm, been studied before.

This study examines how the welfare of Malawian children is associated with whether they live with their parents or not. The children’s welfare is measured by indicators on health, education and child labour obtained from the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2004, and analysed using SAS programming software. Without claiming to estimate a causal effect or provide a basis for recommendations of appropriate strategies for individuals, I examine how the relationship between co-residence with parents and indicators of child welfare can be explained. Although the DHS does not ask directly about parental migration, this study is also able to estimate the welfare effect of having a migrant father.

There are thus two main research questions:

- What is the relationship between Malawian children’s welfare and whether their mothers and fathers are dead, living somewhere else, or living in the household?
What are the welfare differences between children whose father is a migrant and other children?

The thesis consists of three main parts: Chapter two reviews some of the previous research in the field. There are several reasons why living without parents can influence children’s welfare, in negative or positive directions, and some of the most important factors are examined. Since this study specifically examines the situation for migrants’ children left behind, the chapter also provides some background information on today’s migration debate and on Malawian migration more specifically.

Chapter three presents the data, methods, and variables used in this study. The children in Malawi are first categorised into nine subgroups according to whether the mother and the father are alive, and whether they live in the household. Secondly, I identify a group of children living with their mother while their father most probably is a migrant. The chapter also discusses different measures of children’s welfare, and proposes indicators on education, health and child labour. These measures do not capture all parts of a child’s current well-being, but may still give important information on welfare differences.

In chapter 4, the nine categories of children are compared to see how they differ in welfare, using logistic regression analysis. The same method is also used to examine the welfare of migrants’ children, comparing them with three other groups of children who also live with their mother, but whose father is present, dead, or divorced from the mother.

In chapter 5, the findings are discussed and related to the theory presented in chapter 2, and some policy implications are suggested based on the findings.
2. Theory, previous research, and background

Why should children who do not live with both parents have different welfare from children living with both their mother and father?

Using literature from research on divorce, migration, and orphanhood, it is possible to identify a number of factors that influence children’s welfare depending on their coresidential status with the mother and/or father. While several of these factors point in the direction of lower welfare connected to not living with parents, other factors suggest certain advantages.

Some of the most important factors are presented below. They are non-exclusive, and usually a child’s situation is best described by several of them. The degree to which a certain factor is relevant, can depend on the causes for not living with parents (like divorce, death, migration, or polygamy), whether the child lives with none or one of the parents, and whether this parent is the mother or the father.

2.1 Factors contributing to reduced welfare

2.1.1 Parents are not there to provide love and care

Absence of parental love and care is generally regarded to be a great disadvantage for a child. Parents are thought to be among the best persons to satisfy not only a child’s physical needs, but also to provide the care, affection, protection, and emotional support a child needs for a healthy development.

Research on children affected by divorce often concludes that these children fare somewhat worse than children living with both parents. One explanation for this disadvantage is the reduced contact with the non-resident parent (Amato and Keith, 1991). Because the absent parent tends to maintain some contact after divorce, the disadvantages might be even greater for children whose father or mother has died. However, a recent study has shown that the difference between children with divorced parents and those with a dead parent is not very large after controlling for selection (Steele et al, 2009). (Selection implies that the groups compared are not necessarily comparable because certain people tend to end up in certain groups, causing a biased sample).
The loss of a parent due to HIV/AIDS may have an additional negative impact because
the death of the other parent is likely to follow if he/she is also infected (Crampin et al, 2003).

Studies on children left behind by migrant parents find that the children often have
negative emotional and physical reactions, like for instance temper tantrums and loss of appetite,
when their mothers leave (Save the Children, 2006).

There may be differences according to whether the mother or the father is absent. In this
regard, some geographical patterns appear: In South-East Asia the loss seems to be greater with a
migrant mother than a migrant father (Graham, 2008), particularly when the father who stays
behind does not give up traditional gender roles (Parreñas, 2005), whereas studies on orphans in
Africa show that negative educational impacts on paternal orphans were strong in West Africa,
while maternal orphans were more disadvantaged in East Africa (Bicego et al, 2003). A study on
orphans in Malawi shows that maternal as well as double orphans are more likely to face higher
mortality, migration, and slower progress at school than paternal orphans (Ueyama, 2007).

2.1.2 Other guardians of the child may be less committed towards the child’s welfare

The situation for children who live without their mother or father or both in the household,
obviously also depends on the state of their current household and the people who live there.
Some adults have a strong commitment towards the welfare of all children in their households,
whereas others have not. Sometimes children are taken into families who neglect their needs, treat
them as unpaid domestic workers, or even beat and abuse them. In a qualitative study from
Thyolo in Malawi, more than half of the orphans interviewed said that they were treated badly or
differently from the other children in the household they were living in (Funkquist et al, 2007).

What kind of households are best fit to care for somebody else's child? Wealthy
households are more able to pay the necessary expenses for the child, for instance for food,
clothing, school, and health, as well as other material necessities. On the other hand, people who
feel emotionally close to the child may be better able to provide the love and emotional support
that the child needs. Often, this will be the closest family, like grandparents. However, they may
not necessary be wealthy. If economic capacity is given priority when guardians are selected, the
child-receiving households may not be those best equipped to cater for children's non-material
needs, as shown in a qualitative study among orphans in Lesotho and Malawi (Ansell and Young,
2004).

Caring for the child of somebody who is still alive may be different from caring for an
orphan. On the one hand, parents who are alive may, to a certain degree, see to that their child is
well taken care of. On the other hand, caring for an orphan may to a greater extent resemble an adoption, which implies a more long term parental-like commitment for the adults involved.

2.1.3 Parental death or divorce may itself be a traumatic event

Many children who do not live with both parents have experienced parental death or divorce. Such an event may in itself reduce the welfare of the child, particularly if preceded by a long period of parental disease or conflict. Studies of effects of parental divorce on children show that a reunion of separated parents does not benefit children significantly, suggesting that the process of the separation itself – and not just the loss of a parent from the household – may disadvantage the children (Steele et al, 2009). Also, after one parent's death, the surviving parent may be in a state of grief and less able to take care of the child(ren).

2.1.4 The loss of an economically active parent may worsen the household’s economy

The economic vulnerability of children after divorce is well documented (McLanahan, 1999). When a parent dies, the economic burden for the rest of the family includes not only the loss of an income, but also costs associated with preceding medical care and the funeral (UNAIDS, 1999).

2.1.5 If a child is left with another family, this new household gets extra expenses

Caring for one extra child often implies more expenses, reducing the household’s overall wealth. When people live on the margin, the costs of caring for an extra child may adversely affect the household’s economic situation, which may increase the risk for the child being sent to others.

2.1.6 The child may experience stigma

Being different can be hard to cope with for a child. Children not living with both parents may feel stigmatized if their living situation differs from other children’s. In particular, death of a parent from HIV/AIDS may stigmatize a child. However, fieldwork from 2002 in Malawi shows that discrimination of orphans in AIDS-affected areas is less pronounced within the community than at the household level (Mann, no date).

Studies from Ecuador, Mexico, Moldova, and the Philippines found that in some communities, children from migrant parents can be negatively judged or even stigmatized (Cortes, 2008). Awareness of others who are in a similar situation may help the children to cope, knowing that they are not alone (Graham, 2008). Few similar children in a child’s surroundings may result in a higher level of stigma.
2.2 Factors contributing to improved welfare

2.2.1 The child may be left with someone who takes better care of him/her

The notion that parents generally are the ones best suited to take care of all the aspects of a child’s development is not necessarily true or universal. Ethnographic evidence from diverse cultures suggests that there is no uniform approach to child rearing (Mann, 2001). In many cultures in Africa, Asia and Latin-America, responsibility of child care is shared within a large social network, where children often have multiple caregivers or circulate between households and communities, and where it is not considered a hardship for a child to be raised by people other than the parents. Elder siblings may play a more important role for a child’s upbringing than does the mother or father. In many African matrilineal systems, the child’s maternal uncle is more important to the child than its father. Parent-child separation thus does not necessarily have the same meaning for all children in all parts of the world, even at a group level.

Even in cultures where parents normally are the main caretakers of children, examples exist of children staying in households which are better able to care for them than their parents would be. A reason for this may be that a mother and/or father who are about to migrate or die, chooses the best caretakers for the child. This might particularly be the case for migrants, who otherwise have the possibility of staying home, while dying parents can not choose to stay.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, as in many other parts of the world, children with dead or absent parents are normally taken care of by the extended family\(^1\), which often implies that a child is kept in a family environment in their own village. This may smoothen the child’s transition to a new household. In Malawi, the extended families have been playing a key role in caring for others’ children (Beard, 2005). In spite of widespread poverty and an increasing number of AIDS orphans the last decades, there does not seem to be any pervasive breakdown of the extended family structure in Malawi (see e.g. Peters et al, 2008; Chirwa, 2002; and Ueyama, 2007).

Migrants may also consider bringing their children along to the new destination, which sometimes is difficult or dangerous. A study from South-East Asia shows that children brought along by irregular migrants fare worse than children left behind (Bryant, 2005). There are also cases where children of divorced parents fare better than those who have parents living together.

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Marital conflicts have been demonstrated to have negative effects on children, and a divorce may sometimes be a relief if the parents’ relation is so bad that ending the marriage may compensate for the trauma relating to the divorce (Kelly, 2000). Evidence from developing countries in Africa furthermore suggests that children from female-headed households – a common type of household when the father migrates – show higher educational attainment than children from male-headed households (Lloyd and Blanc, 1995).

### 2.2.2 Remittances may improve the household’s economic situation

Remittances from migrant parents may improve the economy of the household, and thereby also benefit the child. Globally, remittances from international migrants are estimated to around 450 billion USD, three times the value of the yearly official development assistance (Global commission on international migration, 2005). Substantial remittances are also sent within countries. Surveys show that about 80-85 percent of remittances are spent on necessities like food and housing (Terry, 2005). Much of the rest is saved, invested in property or education, or used to pay off debts. Some of this money is sent from migrant parents to households where their children live, and may be used to cover school or health expenses for the child directly. It may also benefit the child indirectly by reducing the household’s economic vulnerability. A study from Malawi shows that remittances are subject to mental accounting, i.e. it is used differently than income from other sources. To a great extent, remittances in Malawi fund education and have a significantly lower marginal propensity to be consumed than salary and farm income (Davies et al, 2006). This suggests that remittances benefit children more directly than other types of income.

Several studies on children left behind by migrants conclude that these children do not, on average, fare worse than children living with both parents (Bryant, 2005; Whitehead and Hashim, 2005). This is often explained by the remittances, which in some sense seem to make up for the disadvantage of not living with both parents.

While remittances usually reduce the need for child work, such income may however increase the productivity of child labour if the remittances are used to finance productive investments, such as the purchase of land or productive equipment. If this effect is strong, it may lead to more child labour and a higher school drop out rate for migrants’ children.

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2 The estimates are for 2004, and include a $150 billion in formal transfers and ‘perhaps $300 billion’ in additional transfers.
2.2.3 Parental migration exposes the child to new ideas, may change family structure

Remittances may not be the only advantage of having a migrant parent. A mother or father coming home with new knowledge, skills, values, and ideas may give a child useful stimulation. Scholars sometimes point to a so-called ‘brain gain’ at a macro level: When the brain drain raises the expected benefit from education, young people in poor countries are incited to work harder at school. A similar phenomenon may be the case at household levels.

Migration of a parent may also affect the relationship between the mother and the father. Living apart for a long time can be a strain on a marriage. Thus, migration may improve family income but have a negative impact on family structure. On the other hand, migration may be a peaceful solution for parents who might otherwise have divorced, and it may also further empower women.

2.2.4 Orphans no longer have to care for terminal parents

Children with seriously ill parents may have to care for these, and may also have to generate income to compensate for the parent not being able to work, and to pay for health care. If the period of illness lasts for a long time, this may affect school attendance and reduce the children’s welfare in several other ways. This is particularly the case in Sub-Saharan Africa, both due to limited health services and to the fact that AIDS tends to involve longer periods of terminal illness than most other causes of death (Urassa et al, 2002). After a parental death, a child will not have the same care burden and may thus experience a relative increase in welfare.

2.2.5 Inheritance

If both parents die, their property is normally transferred to their children. This may mitigate the loss of income, particularly in agricultural societies where inherited plots of land will be a source of future income. It may also make it more attractive to take care of orphans, if that implies the transfer of property and inheritance rights to the new family. The child may thus increase the economic, social and political power of this family (Mann, 2001). However, in larger parts of southern Africa, allocation of inheritance is not subject to very strict norms, and relatives sometimes grab family property after the death of a parent without also taking care of the children (Muula et al, 2003).
2.3 Children as migrants

Some of the children not living with their parents are themselves migrants. They may have been sent away to work or to live with other caretakers. In southern Africa, it is not uncommon that a child migrates after parental death (Ansell and van Blerk, 2004). Being migrants may have positive and negative impact on children’s welfare. Moving away from their familiar surroundings and social networks may in itself be traumatic in the short term, as shown in a study on orphan migrants in Lesotho and Malawi (Ansell and Young, 2004). The study further shows that children not living with their parents were more likely to undertake more than one migration, often due to relatives not being able to support them anymore. When grandparents took in orphans, the arrangement was three times more likely to last compared to when orphans were let into the homes of aunts and uncles. On the other hand, children’s migration does not necessarily lead to reduced welfare. For some, migration can be a valuable experience, increasing self-confidence and independence (Mann, 2001). A fieldwork study from Ghana has revealed that independent migrants’ children often had a positive view of their experiences, because they got an opportunity to develop relationships or skills, and/or to earn an income that allowed them to buy things necessary for their progression into adulthood or to pay for education (Hashim, 2006). Some children move away from their parents and native village to attend school in a town or city, where they may live in boarding schools or with relatives. For many, this represent a golden opportunity to increase their future (and perhaps current) welfare.
2.4 Background: Migration and Malawi

Many of the factors above can affect a child whose father or mother is a migrant. In this study, the welfare situation for migrants’ children in Malawi will be examined specifically.

An increasing number of people are affected by migration in today’s world, and the welfare situation for children left behind by migrants is subject to discussion. Before analysing the welfare of migrants’ children in Malawi, some background information on global migration and Malawian migration might be useful.

2.4.1 Costs and benefits of migration

Hundreds of million people in today’s world are migrants. They live away from their place of origin, and sometimes also away from their closest family. They constitute a highly diverse group, ranging from high-skilled professionals moving to or between rich countries to poor refugees, people moving away for marriage or land workers moving to another part of their country for jobs at large agricultural estates.

As the group of migrants is diverse, so are the consequences of migration. Movement of people has obvious advantages. At a micro level, people normally move to improve their lives, economically, socially or in other ways. At a macro level, labour migration implies that labour may be used as input where the returns from labour are highest, thus contributing to an improved economic efficiency. Migration often involves the spreading of ideas and technology. Sometimes people move to study, thus increasing human capital. The relatively familiar notion of ‘brain drain’ has been challenged by new notions: ‘Brain gain’ – emphasizing how brain drain can raise the expected benefit from education in the sending country and induce more school effort, which is thought to lead to an increase in welfare and growth, ‘gain-gain’ – describing the positive effects that mobility of talent may have to both the migrant, the sending country and the host country, and ‘brain export’ – used when the sending country actually profits from brain migration because the returns, like new knowledge and remittances, are so high. Due to the poverty-reducing effect of money sent from migrants (Page and Adams, 2003; Adams 2006), remittances are now widely regarded as a powerful tool for development in poor countries.

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[^1]: The number of international migrants has been estimated to 191 million in 2005 – amounting to three per cent of the world’s population (United Nations Population Division, 2006a). In addition, there are millions of internal migrants, who have moved from one part of their country to another. The total number of migrants in the world is unknown.

[^2]: The World Bank estimates that migrant workers sent 328 billion USD home to their families in 2008 (Economist 2009).
Migration, however, also has costs. There are still numerous examples of brain drain from poor to rich countries, tapping the former for human capital and needed skilled personnel, particularly within the health sector. While ‘brain drain’ indicates that the poor country looses more professionals than they gain, there are also examples of ‘brain waste’, i.e. a well educated physician from a poor country working as a cleaner in a rich country. Following the last decades’ feminization of migration\(^5\), the sending areas may in addition loose important persons in the care of children and elderly – so called ‘care drain’.

Children left behind by migrant parents may experience both advantages and disadvantages of the migration. They may benefit from remittances, new ideas and knowledge, but at the same time they may suffer from the parental absence.

There is no agreement of the general effect of parental migration on these children. While much of the cross-sectional quantitative research finds no disadvantage, several qualitative studies and panel surveys find welfare losses among children left behind by migrants. Reviewing studies on children left behind in Africa after parental migration, Whitehead and Hashim (2005) find it difficult to generalise whether the impact on the migrants’ children is positive or negative.

### 2.4.2 Malawian migration

The history of the territory which now is Malawi is also a history of migration. Most of the ethnic groups in today’s Malawi have come from other parts of Africa. And ever since the dark times of slavery, people have left their homes and often their families to work elsewhere. During colonial times, many Malawian men were recruited to the mines and agricultural sectors in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Zaire. Most of them returned to Malawi (Kamwaza, 2007). This migration pattern increased in the decades after the independence in 1964, and Malawian mine work in South Africa reached a peak in the early 1970s. Since the 1980s, the opportunities for mining work in South Africa have diminished (Chipeta and Kachaka, 2005), and so has work on Zimbabwean estates after the last decade’s economic and political crises there.

The Malawian estate sector experienced a rapid growth in the 1970s, which meant new opportunities ‘at home’, and increased internal migration from other parts of the country. This was particularly the case in the Central region, which also offered employment within the construction industry when the capital city was moved to Lilongwe in 1975. Thus, the Central region attracted migrants both from Northern and Southern regions in the 1970s (Malawi NSO, \(^5\) In 2005, women constituted almost 50 per cent of all international migrants, up from 47 per cent in 1960 (United Nations Population Division 2006b)
Malawi is most densely populated in the south, and as population has grown, it has been harder to find idle agricultural land in this region, and the south has become a main exporter of migrants to the two other regions (Potts, 2006).

Migration within Malawi has increased steadily since the independence. In a 2004-2005 survey, 17 per cent of the households had moved during the last five years (Malawi NSO, no date). Malawi’s economy is mainly agricultural, and there is a substantial rural-rural migration (Potts, 2006). Malawi is also one of the 20 countries with the most rapid urbanization from 1975 to 2000 (UN, 2004). The majority of Malawian migrants are men, as is the case in most southern African countries (Hughes, 2007).

A new sort of international migration has appeared over the last decade: Malawi has lost important health personnel to rich countries. Between 2000 and 2005, almost 300 health workers migrated to the UK alone (Malawi NSO, 2006), and Malawi’s skilled emigrants comprise 19 per cent of the country’s educated labour force (Özden and Schiff, 2006).

Migration within Sub-Sahara Africa is seldom permanent, and is often best described as circulation (Adepoju, 2008). In Malawi, lifetime (permanent) migration seems to have declined over the period 1928-2004 (Malawi NSO, 2006). As an ethnographic study among migrants in Lilongwe indicates, most of the migrants never really leave their home village, and usually plan to return after some time in the city (Englund, 2002).

Remittances from abroad amounted to an estimated one million USD in 2005 (UN Population Division, 2006a), but there are also considerable remittances from internal migrants. Altogether, remittances from migrants constituted 13 per cent of Malawian household income in 1998, and 20 per cent of the poor households received remittances, which tend to mitigate the impact of income fluctuations (Chipeta and Kachaka, 2005). Around two-thirds of the migrants who remit are males, and two out of three remitters are married (Malawi NSO, 2006). Remittances in Malawi are to a large extent used to fund education, and they are more likely to be saved than other income (Davies et al, 2006).

There are, however, no comprehensive or updated figures on the number of international and internal Malawian migrants, nor are there any figures on the number of children in Malawi affected by parental migration.
3. Data and method

To what extent does children’s welfare depend on their parents being alive and around? In this empirical study, I will use the Demographic and Health Survey (Malawi NSO and ORC Macro 2005) to assign children to different categories of parental situations, and see if there are differences in welfare indicators on education, health, and child labour. This enables an examination on children’s welfare according to the two research questions: How the children’s welfare is affected by having the mother and/or the father alive and present, and more specifically how the children of migrant fathers fare.

In this chapter, I will first present the data and method used in this study. Thereafter, I will discuss the variables included and show the distribution of children across to the variables.

3.1 The Demographic and Health Survey

Malawi’s Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2004 provides high quality data on several aspects of households’ welfare situation, including specific information on health, education, and child labour for each child in the household. For each child, the respondents were asked about the parental status, i.e. whether the mother was alive and whether she was living in the household, and correspondingly for the father. This information makes it possible to divide Malawian children into subgroups according to whether their mother and father live in the household and whether they are alive. And although the DHS does not ask directly about parental migration, the data may still be used to estimate the welfare of children whose mother or father is most probably a migrant.

Demographic and Health Surveys are carried out in most developing countries and have been conducted quite regularly since the 1980s, allowing comparisons over time and between countries. The methodology of this study sheds light on this potential.

The sample used in the DHS for Malawi 2004 covers a total of 29,294 children below 15 years. Among these, 342 were not normally living in the household. These children are removed from my sample, leaving 28,952 children for further analyses.
3.2 Methodology and variables

Logistic regression analyses will be performed to investigate the connection between the different categories/groups of children (independent variables) and welfare indicators (dependent variables), controlling for background factors like age, sex and urban/rural residence (control variables). The relationship between the different factors may be illustrated as in figure 1, and will be discussed further when the variables are presented later in this chapter.

**Figure 1:** Factors affecting parental co-residence and child welfare.

The dependent variables (the indicators of child welfare) used in this study will be binary and thus take only one of two alternatives (attending school or not, being undernourished or not etc), and I will use logistic regression models to estimate the effects of different parental co-residence on the probability of experiencing an event, e.g. for a child to attend school, given their age, sex, coresidential status with mother/father etc. Logistic regression is a common tool for predicting the odds of an event, where the odds in favour of an event can be expressed as \( p/(1-p) \), \( p \) being the probability of the event.

All analyses are conducted using the SAS 9.1 software.
3.2.1 Independent variables

In 2004, Malawi had approximately 6.2 million children below 15 years\(^6\). According to the DHS, around 60 per cent of them lived with both parents, 22 per cent lived with only one parent and 18 per cent lived with neither of their parents.

**Nine categories**

The children can be organized in nine different categories according to their parents’ status, as also shown in the DHS report. The categories are mutually exclusive, and are presented in table 1.

**Table 1 Children in Malawi, by parents’ status. Percentage in each category. 2004.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mother in household</th>
<th>Mother alive, not in household</th>
<th>Mother dead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Father in household</strong></td>
<td>Category 1 (living with both parents)</td>
<td>Category 2 (living with father, mother alive but absent)</td>
<td>Category 3 (living with father, mother dead)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60.1 %</td>
<td>1.6 %</td>
<td>0.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Father alive, but not in household</strong></td>
<td>Category 4 (living with mother, father alive but absent)</td>
<td>Category 5 (mother and father alive but absent)</td>
<td>Category 6 (mother dead, father alive but absent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.2 %</td>
<td>10.8 %</td>
<td>1.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Father dead</strong></td>
<td>Category 7 (living with mother, father dead)</td>
<td>Category 8 (mother alive but absent, father dead)</td>
<td>Category 9 (mother and father dead)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.5 %</td>
<td>2.4 %</td>
<td>3.0 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally 0.7 per cent, or 154 of the children, had missing information on mother and/or father. Due to oversampling in some districts the percentages are weighted.

The four categories in the lower right part of the table (category 5, 6, 8 and 9), consist of children living with neither of their parents. 18 per cent of the children fall in one of these categories – which means that almost every fifth Malawian child lives with none of her/his parents. Absent (but alive) parents is a far more common reason than parental death for children not living with any of their parents.

Quite a lot of research has been done on AIDS orphans in Africa. In Malawi, around 13 per cent of the children below 15 years in 2004 had lost one or both parents. This corresponds to around 800,000 children. In much of this research literature, children with only one dead parent are labelled ‘single orphans’, whereas the ones with two dead parents are called ‘double orphans’\(^7\). In the DHS material, three per cent of the children are double orphans, corresponding

\(^6\) In the International data base of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the estimated midyear population of Malawi in 2004 was 12,677,210. The corresponding estimate of the United Nations Population Division was 12,894,000. According to the DHS, 48.6 per cent of Malawi’s 2004 population was 0-14 years.

\(^7\) In Malawian folklore, ‘orphans’ are not necessarily children who have lost their parents to death. In the languages of Malawi, the term for orphan includes notions on poverty, lack of resources, to get astray, to be left behind (Chirwa, 2002). The DHS did not ask about orphans as such, but the status of each child’s parents.
to around 200,000 children. Their parents may have died for a number of reasons, HIV/AIDS accounting for around 60 per cent of the cases. The popular impression that Malawi has one million AIDS orphans (Madonna, 2008) may therefore be somewhat exaggerated.

The children in the nine categories differ in mean age, wealth of the household and urban/rural residence, as summarized in table 2.

Table 2 Children in Malawi by category, mean age, household wealth, and urban/rural residence. 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father in household</th>
<th>Mother in household</th>
<th>Mother alive, but absent</th>
<th>Mother dead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>– living with both parents</td>
<td>Mean age: 5.8</td>
<td>Mean age: 9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wealth: 3.1</td>
<td>Wealth: 3.8</td>
<td>Wealth: 3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.86</td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.71</td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of children: 60.1</td>
<td>Percentage of children: 1.6</td>
<td>Percentage of children: 0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of sample children: 17,229</td>
<td>Number of sample children: 413</td>
<td>Number of sample children: 186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>– living with father, mother absent</td>
<td>Mean age: 8.7</td>
<td>Mean age: 9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wealth: 3.8</td>
<td>Wealth: 2.8</td>
<td>Wealth: 2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.71</td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.87</td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of children: 1.6</td>
<td>Percentage of children: 10.8</td>
<td>Percentage of children: 1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of sample children: 413</td>
<td>Number of sample children: 3,122</td>
<td>Number of sample children: 560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>– living with father, mother dead</td>
<td>Mean age: 9.1</td>
<td>Mean age: 10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wealth: 3.6</td>
<td>Wealth: 3.0</td>
<td>Wealth: 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.73</td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.82</td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of children: 0.7</td>
<td>Percentage of children: 3.0</td>
<td>Percentage of children: 2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of sample children: 186</td>
<td>Number of sample children: 820</td>
<td>Number of sample children: 691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>– living with mother, father absent</td>
<td>Mean age: 5.9</td>
<td>Mean age: 9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wealth: 2.5</td>
<td>Wealth: 3.0</td>
<td>Wealth: 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.92</td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.80</td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of children: 14.2</td>
<td>Percentage of children: 2.4</td>
<td>Percentage of children: 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of sample children: 4,217</td>
<td>Number of sample children: 691</td>
<td>Number of sample children: 820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>– mother and father absent</td>
<td>Mean age: 8.5</td>
<td>Mean age: 9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wealth: 2.8</td>
<td>Wealth: 2.8</td>
<td>Wealth: 2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.87</td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.86</td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of children: 10.8</td>
<td>Percentage of children: 1.8</td>
<td>Percentage of children: 1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of sample children: 3,122</td>
<td>Number of sample children: 560</td>
<td>Number of sample children: 560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>– mother dead, father absent</td>
<td>Mean age: 9.4</td>
<td>Mean age: 10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wealth: 2.8</td>
<td>Wealth: 3.0</td>
<td>Wealth: 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.86</td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.82</td>
<td>Rural residence: 0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of children: 1.8</td>
<td>Percentage of children: 3.0</td>
<td>Percentage of children: 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of sample children: 560</td>
<td>Number of sample children: 820</td>
<td>Number of sample children: 820</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean age is measured in years. Household wealth is measured on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is the richest quintile and 1 is the poorest quintile of the population. Rural residence ranges between 0 and 1 – urban residence scoring 0 and rural residences scoring 1. A low figure on wealth and a high figure on rural residence thus indicate a large proportion of poor, rural households.

Mean age is substantially higher among children with one or both parents dead than among those living with both parents. This is not surprising, as the risk of having lost a parent increases with age. Also the risk of having a parent living somewhere else seems to increase with age, possibly except for the group living with their mother while their father lives elsewhere. These children are

---

8 The DHS is a household survey, and therefore does not include orphanages and similar institutions. The total figure on double orphans in Malawi in 2004 is therefore probably higher than 200,000.

9 According to USAID/UNICEF/UNAIDS 2004, just over 60 per cent of African double orphans have lost one or both parents due to AIDS. Their estimate on double orphans in Malawi in 2003 is 270,000 children (age 0-18), 190,000 of them due to AIDS.
about the same age as children living with both their parents, which may indicate that many fathers leave when their children are small (or even before they are born).

Household wealth is also unevenly distributed, and the categories can be divided into three groups: The poorest group, consisting of children living with their mother only (categories 4 and 7), the wealthiest group, consisting of children living with their father only (categories 2 and 3), and a middle group consisting of children living with both parents (category 1) and children living with neither of their parents (categories 5, 6, 8 and 9). These wealth differences will be discussed further in the next chapter.

In this study, the nine categories will be used to estimate differences in children’s welfare by whether the mother and the father are alive or not and living in the household or not. To estimate the effect of parental migration, a more specific grouping of the children is needed.

**Identifying migrants’ children**

The Demographic and Health Survey 2004 for Malawi does not ask directly about parents’ migration and actually not very much about migration at all. This makes research on migrants’ children apparently difficult. However, the DHS does ask about whether parents live in the household or not, whether they are alive or not, and there are also questions on martial status and cohabiting. This information will be used to identify migrants’ children.

First, it is possible to sort out which of the nine categories that may contain children affected by parental migration:

- Category 2: living with father, mother elsewhere,
- Category 4: living with mother, father elsewhere,
- Category 5: mother and father elsewhere,
- Category 6: mother dead, father elsewhere, and
- Category 8: father dead, mother elsewhere.

Among these, the DHS provides information about the parents in category 2 and 4 (when parents are absent or dead, no further information about them is available). In these two categories, we may find children who live with one of their parent while the other parent is a migrant. But the absent parent may also have divorced his/her partner and left their children. Divorces are not uncommon in Malawi, five per cent of the whole population and ten per cent of the heads of household are divorced or separated (Malawi NSO, 2008). The child’s father may also have several wives, each wife living with her children in separate households. According to the DHS, around ten per cent of married men in Malawi have more than one wife.
Since the DHS provides information on parents’ marital status, we may exclude the children living with a divorced parent or with a mother who is one of several wives. This information can be drawn from the DHS’ separate interviews with each woman (15-49 years) in the household, and with some of the men (15-54 years). By combining the information on marital and cohabiting status in these female and male questionnaires with the information on children from the household questionnaire, it is possible to get closer to isolating the children of labour migrants and identifying their situation.

The men’s questionnaire is not as comprehensive as the women’s. It had only 5,261 respondents (less than half of the female respondents), and as category 2 is small at the outset and since most Malawian migrants are men, I will concentrate on finding the male migrants’ children who are living with their mother (from category 4). It is still possible to single out children in category 2 who may have a migrant mother, but in the DHS sample this results in less than 100 children on whom further analyses will not be conducted\textsuperscript{10}.

How do we find the children in category 4 whose fathers are probably labour migrants? Using information from the women’s questionnaire, it is possible to single out women who

- are married or living with a man
- state that their husbands/partners are staying somewhere else
- are the only wives of their husbands

This will exclude all separated, divorced and widowed women, wives of men with several wives, and it also excludes women who are living with their (current) husbands. Thus, there is reason to believe that the bulk of the women we are left with, have migrant husbands.

If we combine this information with the child information from the household questionnaire, we can single out all the children in category 4 with a mother who fulfils the criteria above. Doing this, we end up with 739 children\textsuperscript{11} whose father is living somewhere else, and whose mother is married/living with a man and states that her husband/partner is staying somewhere else without being married to more than one woman\textsuperscript{12}.

\textsuperscript{10} Combining the marital information from the men’s questionnaire (there is a question on marital status, but, unlike in the female questionnaire, no questions on whether the wife stays with him or not) and the child information from the household questionnaire, it is possible to find all children who live with their father, their mother living somewhere else (category 2), and whose father states that he is married/living with a woman. Because category 2 is a small category, and because only some of the men were interviewed, only 96 children fall into this group (0.33 per cent of all the children). Combined with the fact that some of these children may have divorced parents, their father having married another woman (whom he may live with), one should be careful not to draw any certain conclusions on maternal migration from this material.

\textsuperscript{11} The group would have been larger (2058) if all children in category 4 with a married/cohabiting mother were included. However, that would also have included children not living with their biological father, their mother having married another man – which implies divorce rather than migration.

\textsuperscript{12} For 8,371 (29 per cent) of the children there is no information on the mother’s marital status. Of these, 5,792 have a mother who does not live in the household. The remaining 2,579 children (nine per cent of all children) may have mothers who live in the
Probably most of these men are both the father of the child and the husband of the mother. There may, however, also be cases where the child’s father has left the family altogether, the mother has married a new man, and this new man is now living somewhere else. In those cases, this new husband and step father is likely, anyway, to be a migrant.

To summarize, the 739 children identified are probably migrants’ left-behind children and will from now on be labelled *migrants’ children*. They constitute (after weighting) 2.5 per cent of all children in the DHS. This corresponds to around 150,000 Malawian children. There may be left-behind children in some of the other categories as well, most notably category 5 (both parents elsewhere) and categories 6 and 8 (father/mother elsewhere, the other parent dead). But due to lack of information about these parents in the DHS, it’s hard to distinguish the migrants’ children from the other children in these groups, and such an attempt will not be done in this study.

How sure can we be that the *migrants’ children* identified actually have a migrant father? To explore more about common reasons for why fathers are not living in the household, interviews were conducted with teachers in two different primary schools around Zomba. The teachers confirmed that the two main situations where children live with their mother while their father is absent, are divorce and the fact that the father has moved away to earn money. Other suggested reasons, like studying, were not common, according to these primary school teachers.

Another way to check the probability that these children really have a migrant father is to investigate the regional distribution of the children, compared with the regional migration pattern in Malawi. According to Malawi’s Migration Baseline Report, the internal migration since the 1970s has mainly been from the Southern and Northern region to the Central region, although the volume of this migration has slowed down. Potts (2006) finds that more recently also the Northern region has had a net inflow of migrants, mainly from the Southern region. Chipeta and Kachaka’s study (2005) on migrant’s remittances in Malawi in 1998 found that households in the Northern region receive most remittances – accounting for 35 per cent of total household income in this region. The corresponding figures for Central and Southern region were eight and nine per cent, respectively.

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13 The terminology does not imply that each child in this group necessarily is the child of a migrant, as elaborated above.
14 Also, many of the foster children are probably migrants themselves, having moved from their parents’ home to their new household, but they are not further dealt with in this study.
15 Chikowi Primary School and Chawe LEA Primary School
If Malawi’s migrants mainly move from one region to another, we could expect to find many left behind children in the Southern region and, perhaps to a lesser extent, in the Northern region.

The migrants’ children identified in this study constitute 3.2 per cent of the children in Northern region, 1.4 per cent of the children in Central region and 3.2 of the children in Southern region. The regional pattern is thus relatively consistent with the hypotheses that the children have a migrant father.

How is the welfare of these migrants’ children? To investigate this question, it is necessary to compare the migrants’ children with other groups. Since they live with their mother, I will compare them with other children also living with their mother, but whose father is not a migrant. This includes three groups:

- children living with both parents (because many of the migrants’ children would belong to this group were it not for the migration)\(^{16}\)
- children living with their mother, their parents being divorced (because they live under similar conditions to the migrants’ children, the main difference being the migration)\(^{17}\)
- children living with their mother, their father being dead (who also have some of the same conditions as migrants’ children, but with a father who is not available at all)\(^{18}\)

Limiting the study to children who live with their mother thus makes it easier to study the effect of different types of father’s absence. Another advantage is that most of these mothers have answered the women’s questionnaire, which gives us access to important variables – for instance mother’s education. Table 3 presents some relevant information about the four groups.

### Table 3 Number of children, mean age, household wealth, and urban/rural residence for children with migrant, divorced, dead, or present fathers. 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean age</th>
<th>Wealth</th>
<th>Rural residence</th>
<th>Mother’s education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father migrant</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>4.9 years</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>4.7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father in household</td>
<td>17,229</td>
<td>5.8 years</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>3.7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents divorced</td>
<td>1,525</td>
<td>5.7 years</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>3.3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father dead</td>
<td>1,560</td>
<td>8.5 years</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>3.6 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of children: 21,053 aged 0-14. (7,899 of the DHS children belong to neither of these groups). Mother’s education shows number of school years.

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\(^{16}\) This group is the same as category 1 in the previous chapter (children living with both parents).

\(^{17}\) This group comprises all children in category 4 whose mother states that she and her former partner is divorced or ‘not living together’. I have not included the ‘never married’ women, comprising almost 200 children. This is a sort of middle category between dead and divorced father – perhaps the father does not even know about the child.

\(^{18}\) This group is the same as category 7 in the previous chapter (children living with mother, father dead).
Migrants’ children are the youngest group. Compared with children living with both parents, the migrants’ children also live in slightly poorer and more rural households. This may indicate that a lot of the male migration in Malawi is a result of poverty.

The households of migrants’ children are, however, wealthier than those of children with a dead father, and far wealthier than those where the parents are divorced. This difference may be partly due to remittances from the migrant father. It is also worth noting that the migrants’ children have the most educated mothers. They also have the youngest mothers, 29 years on average, compared with 31 in groups 2 and 3, and 36 years in group 4 (not shown in table).

As already shown, the migrants’ children tend to live more often in the Northern and Southern region. Some of the welfare differences observed between the groups may thus be due to regional differences, not their fathers’ whereabouts.

### 3.2.2 Dependent variables

A child’s welfare is difficult to measure directly. There is no single indicator of a good life. It is, however, possible to get a picture of some important elements of welfare through indirect measures.

Health may be such a measure. A sick or unhealthy child – all else equal – has a lower welfare than a healthy child. Education is another indicator of children’s welfare, as schooling gives children the necessary inputs for cognitive development. It may also be an indicator of parents’ or foster parents’ commitments towards a child: Sending children to school probably implies a commitment to give them good chances in life – not to exploit them or let them fall behind compared to other children. Health and education indicators also give important signs about future welfare.

The DHS asks several questions on children’s health, education and work. There are questions on school attendance and educational attainment, on diseases, vaccination, height, weight and haemoglobin level, on use of mosquito nets, and on different types of child labour.

However, some of the questions are directed to the mothers, through the women’s questionnaire. This makes comparison with children whose mother was not there, difficult. The household questionnaire has, however, also some questions on children’s welfare which will be used in this study.

Some indicators are useful for measuring a child’s welfare history, such as stunting (short height for age) or educational attainment. However, this study needs indicators that measure the current welfare situation, because we only know the children’s current household situation, not
how long they have been living in the household or where they may have lived before. Indicators like current school attendance, use of mosquito nets and wasting (low weight for height) thus provide a better picture of how children are treated at the time of the survey.

Some variables only give information on children below five years or from age five to 14. I will therefore conduct separate analyses for the youngest (0-4 years) and the oldest (5-14 years) children. This study’s indicators have been chosen to get a broad impression of the current welfare of the child, without including too many variables that make the analyses too complex. They are presented below:

**Use of mosquito net**

I the DHS, the head of household is asked whether each of the household’s children slept under a mosquito net last night\(^\text{19}\). Far from all households in Malawi have bed nets, and particularly not for each bed. Mosquito nets are provided through several channels in Malawi, e.g. through health facilities (in particular connected to maternity clinics) and by non-governmental organizations, and some are also sold in shops. Because malaria is especially dangerous to children under five years, malaria prevention strategies in Malawi have targeted these children. Information on who benefits from the household’s mosquito net(s) may reveal attitudes of the family’s priorities and care for each child.

On average, 80 per cent of the youngest children and 89 per cent of the oldest children in Malawi did not sleep under a bed net the night before the survey. The differences between the nine categories are shown in table 4, and the differences between migrants’ children and other groups of children living with their mother are shown in table 5.

**Wasting**

For the youngest children in the household (less than five years), the DHS has measured height and weight. These indicators reveal a lot about nutritional and health status. Low height for age (stunting) represents chronic malnutrition, low weight for height (wasting) represents acute or recent malnutrition, and low weight for age (underweight) describes the overall measure of malnutrition. Children can be underweight for their age because of stunting, wasting, or both. To capture current welfare situation, wasting is preferred measure because this level changes most rapidly with food availability and the disease situation of the child.

\(^{19}\) The DHS also distinguishes between nets treated with insecticide and untreated nets. I have merged these two groups.
Children in Malawi are generally malnourished (Chirwa and Ngalawa, 2008). In the DHS 2004, 48 percent of children under five in Malawi had experienced poor nutrition over a long period and were thus stunted, and 22 per cent were underweight. Five per cent were wasted.

Children are characterised as moderately wasted when they are between two and three standard deviations below the weight-for-height median of the standard reference population\textsuperscript{20}, and severely wasted if it is more than three standard deviations below. Only 1.6 per cent of the Malawian children fall in the latter group. Using moderate wasting as a measure of child welfare, the differences between the nine categories are shown in table 4. The situation for migrants’ children is shown in table 5.

\textit{Educational activity}

For children five years or older, the DHS’ indicator on current school status shows what possibilities the children are given today, regardless of previous school achievements. This measure is therefore chosen as an indicator of current welfare. Attending school not only gives children the opportunity to acquire useful skills which may improve current (and future) welfare, it also gives the children valuable social networks and reduces the risk of being exploited by extensive child labour. At the time of the survey, 19 per cent of Malawian children aged 6-14 were not going to school\textsuperscript{21}. Although primary school in Malawi has been free of charge since 1994, sending a child to school means that the child cannot work as much at home, and school uniforms and other expenses are often required. The non-school-attendance is presented in tables 4 and 5.

\textit{Child labour}

The DHS has records of labour among children 5-14 years, including help with housekeeping chores, work at the family farm or business, and work for someone who is not member of the household. The welfare disadvantage of child labour may be hard to define, and it certainly differs by the age of the child. UNICEF defines child labour as work that exceeds a minimum number of hours, depending on the age of the child and the type of work:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{Ages 5-11:} At least one hour of economic work or 28 hours domestic work weekly.
  \item \textbf{Ages 12-14:} At least 14 hours of economic work or 28 hours domestic work weekly.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{20} This is calculated by DHS in variable HC11 using the CDC Standard Deviation-derived Growth Reference Curves derived from the NCHS/FELS/CDC Reference Population.

\textsuperscript{21} Since children in Malawi normally start school at age six, the five years old children have been removed from this subsample.
Defining ‘economic work’ as paid work for someone outside the household, and ‘domestic work’ as help with housekeeping chores or work on family farm/business, it is possible to use DHS data to measure whether children are exposed to harmful labour or not. Of the children aged 5-14 years, nine per cent had been exposed to such child labour, as shown in table 4.

**Diseases**

In the women’s questionnaire, all mothers were asked about diarrhoea and coughing among her youngest (< five years) children the last two weeks before the survey, and what kind of treatment, if any, the sick children had gotten. These variables show important aspects of children’s current health situation, and they also indicate how well they are treated by their caretakers. However, these data are available only for children whose mothers are in the household (and thus eligible for interview) and cannot be used to examine differences across the nine categories. But for a comparison between migrants’ children and the other three groups of children whose mothers live in the household, the variables are useful. Disease occurrence and treatment received are presented in table 5.

**Wealth**

As shown in tables 2 and 3, the household wealth varies considerably across the nine categories and also between the four groups used to investigate the migrants’ children. Household wealth will often have a direct effect on a child’s welfare, as it enables the household to pay for school and health expenses as well as food, clothes and other necessities. However, as shown in figure 1, wealth also has an indirect effect on children’s welfare, because it may affect reasons for parental absence/presence, like the probability of parental death, divorce or migration. Parental absence/presence also affects the household’s wealth.

Wealth can thus also be treated as a control variable in this study, and will be discussed in more detail in the section on control variables.

**Data distribution**

The distribution of data across the nine categories is shown in table 4 (see next page).
Table 4 Welfare disadvantages for children in Malawi by category and age group. 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>The youngest children</th>
<th>The oldest children (5-14 years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No bed net</td>
<td>Wasted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Living with both parents</td>
<td>78 %</td>
<td>4.80 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Living with father, mother elsewhere</td>
<td>86 %</td>
<td>0.00 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Living with father, mother dead</td>
<td>75 %</td>
<td>3.70 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Living with mother, father elsewhere</td>
<td>86 %</td>
<td>5.40 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Mother and father elsewhere</td>
<td>89 %</td>
<td>2.70 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Mother dead, father elsewhere</td>
<td>83 %</td>
<td>3.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Living with mother, father dead</td>
<td>84 %</td>
<td>2.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Mother elsewhere, father dead</td>
<td>79 %</td>
<td>5.00 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Mother and father dead</td>
<td>82 %</td>
<td>14.00 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>80 %</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.80 %</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children (N)</td>
<td>10,727</td>
<td>9,476</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As only some of the children were weighed and measured, three smallest categories the wasted variable (categories 2, 3 and 8) now consists of only 39, 24 and 39 children, respectively.

The DHS household questionnaire asks only one question on the health of children above 5 years: Whether he/she has been seriously sick the last year. However, this does not solely relate to the current welfare, as the child may have arrived in the household less than a year ago. As only 2.6 per cent fell in this category, the question was left out of this study.

For the migrants’ children and the three other groups they are compared with, the data distribution is shown in table 5.

Table 5 Welfare disadvantages, by different types of father absence/presence. 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>The youngest children</th>
<th>The oldest children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No bed net</td>
<td>Too thin for height (wasted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father migrant</td>
<td>83.1 %</td>
<td>7.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father in household</td>
<td>77.8 %</td>
<td>4.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents divorced</td>
<td>90.1 %</td>
<td>3.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father dead</td>
<td>84.4 %</td>
<td>2.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>79.1 %</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.8 %</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>9,201</td>
<td>8,179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last two columns for the youngest children include only children who had diarrhoea or coughing. Medical treatment includes taking the child to health facilities, but does not include pharmacy, shop and traditional practitioner.
It is appropriate to ask to what extent the children who are disadvantaged according to one variable, are the same as those disadvantaged according to a different variable. A clear correlation would indicate a strong association between children’s welfare and their parents’ status. It could also provide the basis for recommending the establishment of one, common aggregated welfare indicator that includes all the correlating variables.

Correlation tests have therefore been conducted for all the variables used on the youngest and the oldest children, respectively. In a correlation test, a score of 1.0 shows a perfect and increasing linear relationship between the two variables tested. A score of -1.0 shows a perfect, but decreasing linear relationship. A score of 0 shows no relationship at all.

The tests show few clear correlations between the variables. There is a strong correlation among the youngest children between treatment for coughing and treatment for diarrhoea (a correlation coefficient of 0.374), and some correlation among the oldest children between sleeping under a mosquito net and school attendance (a correlation coefficient of 0.05), but all the other correlation coefficients were in the area between 0 and +/- 0.04.

3.2.3 Control variables

As tables 4 and 5 show, there are welfare differences between the nine categories and between the four groups of children living with their mother. Some of these differences may, however, be due to the fact that the categories and groups differ in background characteristics like mean age, urban/rural residence and average household wealth, as already shown in tables 2 and 3. As illustrated in figure 1, these factors influence children’s welfare both directly and indirectly, through affecting the causes of parental absence. By controlling for background variables, it is easier to compare each child in this study with other children of the same age and sex, and with the same kind of urban/rural residence etc. That makes it easier to estimate how much of the welfare difference is caused by differences in parental co-residence.

Wealth, however, is not only a background variable. Unlike the other background variables, wealth is to a large extent affected by a child’s parental situation. As mentioned in chapter 2, one parent less in the household in general reduces the income. Wealth thus acts as both a background variable and an intermediate variable. Parental co-residence affects children’s welfare directly through factors like love, care, and attention, but also indirectly through wealth. When controlling for wealth, we may thus remove some of the effect that actually may be due to parental co-residence. Therefore, I will show results both when wealth is controlled for and when it is not.
The wealth index used in this study is developed by the DHS, using information on the presence of household assets like paraffin lamp, bicycle, motorcycle, or car, and dwelling characteristics like water and sanitation facilities and floor material, each asset assigning a weight. Each household is assigned a score for each asset, and the scores are summed for each household. Individuals are ranked according to their household score. The sample is then divided into five groups (quintiles) with the same number of individuals in each – from 1 (lowest wealth) to 5 (highest).

3.2.4 Limitations of the approach

Logistic regression analyses on how the dependent variables (health, school and child labour) are affected by the independent variables (the nine categories and the four groups) – after controlling for background variables – will give us a picture of how parental co-residence affects children’s welfare.

There are, however, limitations to this approach. Welfare loss or welfare gain will always vary from child to child, depending on the child itself, on its current situation, and on its alternative situation – i.e. what life had been like had the parents not died or lived somewhere else. The DHS material only provides information about the current situation, not the alternatives for each child. Therefore, this study will not be able to provide answers on whether each child is actually better or worse off than he/she could have been.

Nor do the estimates tell anything about stability in the children’s life. Stable relations are regarded important for a child, and children living with both parents often have more stable relations with adults than children in other situations. On the other hand: A child currently living with both parents may still have had a turbulent past, whereas a child with no parents in the household may have had a stable life with trustful and strong relations with adults, for instance with a grandmother.

The DHS does not give figures on a child’s happiness, comfort or welfare directly, and hence we use proxy variables to say something about these important factors. Using health and education as indicators of welfare has its limitations, however. A child may suffer from sadness and feeling of loss, even if he/she is healthy and goes to school. Psychological effects of not living with parents are more difficult to capture in quantitative surveys, but that does not mean that they do not exist or affect children’s welfare.

Bearing these limitations in mind, it is possible to investigate what the DHS material reveals about the welfare of Malawian children not living with both their parents.
4. Results

A glance at table 4 suggests that children not living with both their parents are, in many ways, disadvantaged. Children with both parents dead (category 9) are most often wasted, most often exposed to child labour, and when they are older they most often sleep without a bed net. Children with both parents elsewhere (category 5) are the most disadvantaged ones when measuring bed net use among the youngest children. Children living with their mother only and with their father somewhere else (category 4) have the lowest school attendance and are also relatively often exposed to child labour and sleeping without a bed net. When comparing migrants’ children to other groups of children living with their mother (table 5), it is hard to draw any clear conclusions. The migrants’ children seem disadvantaged when welfare is measured in wasting, but are the ones who are most often taken to health facility when ill. And they seem to be the least disadvantaged when measured by school attendance.

Some of these differences may, however, be due to differences in age, sex, rural/urban residence or wealth. Bed net use is, for instance, strongly correlated with the age of a child. There are differences in the use of mosquito nets between rural and urban areas in Malawi. There is also a clear correlation between bed net use and household wealth: In the poorest quintile, less than one in ten children used bed net, while more than four in ten used bed nets in the richest quintile.

Controlling for such factors will make it easier to determinate how the welfare of children actually depends on their parental situation. In this chapter, I will present odds ratios of being disadvantaged. An odds ratio is the ratio of the odds of an event occurring in one group to the odds of it occurring in another group. Odds ratios greater than 1 imply that the event is more likely in this group than in the reference group, and it is vice versa with odds ratios below 1.

4.1 Welfare across the nine categories

Before controlling for the aforementioned background factors, I will present the wealth differences between the categories in more detail. This will reveal some basic differences between the children, and it may also reveal some important features of the Malawian society. As already noted, the categories may be divided into three groups:

The poorest group: Children living with their mother only, their father dead or absent (categories 4 and 7), live in the poorest households. They also live in more rural areas, which
may explain some of the low wealth (rural households are in general poorer than urban ones). The low wealth also reflects that many of these households have only one (female) income.

**The wealthiest group:** On the other hand, children living with their father only (categories 2 and 3) live in households that are even wealthier than the households with both parents around, which may indicate that fathers take care of their motherless children only if they are quite rich. Also, these children live in more urban areas. In rural Malawi, the extended family (in matrilineal systems the maternal family), not the father, usually takes care of a child if the mother is unable to.

Some of the children in this group may also have moved to a father in town, for instance to continue their education, which may partly explain why their mean age is relatively high.

There are also interesting regional differences (not shown in the table): Children who live with only their mother, tend to be found in southern Malawi, while children who live with their father more often live in the north. This may reflect the fact that northern Malawi is dominated by patrilineal societies, whereas the societies in the south are mainly matrilineal (Peters, 1997). In a matrilineal society, the husband usually moves into the wife’s village. This may make it easier for him to move away again, leaving his wife and children behind.

**The middle group** consists of two types of categories: Children who live with both of their parents, and those with no parents in the household. I label this last type ‘foster children’, and they belong to categories 5, 6, 8, and 9. The foster children live in almost as wealthy households as the children with both parents alive and around. Even if both parents are dead, the orphans do not tend to end up in the poorest households. Children with a dead father live in slightly richer and slightly more urban households than those with an absent (but alive) father.

Most of the foster children, in all the four categories, live with their grandparent(s). It is also common to live with other relatives, and almost ten per cent live with a – presumably elder – sister or brother. A few have already married and are the daughter-/son-in-law of the household head, or even wife/husband. Only seven children (0.15 per cent) were heads of households

In a country where the extended family has the main responsibility for taking care of the family’s many children (Chirwa, 2002), it is not surprising that so many of these children are fostered by relatives. However, these living arrangements may be unstable – foster children tend to move more often than other children, depending on the different households’ abilities to take care of them (Ansell and Young, 2004).

---

22 Four of these seven children had both parents elsewhere, two of them had one parent alive but absent, and one was a double orphan.
The estimates only show the wealth of the household. How that wealth is shared among the household members, and whether the foster children get a fair share, cannot be read out of the table. However, it is noteworthy that orphans’ households are not worse off, economically, than for instance households of children living with only their mother, or children with both parents absent. In fact, when it comes to the wealth of the household, double orphans are only surpassed by children living with both parents or their father only. This is worth bearing in mind when drawing up policies to help vulnerable children in Malawi.

4.1.1 The youngest children

What are the welfare estimates when we compare children from different categories who otherwise have a similar background? A logistic regression analysis for the children below five years, controlled for age, sex, urbanity, and wealth, gives the results shown in table 6.

Table 6 Odds ratio estimates for being disadvantaged according to selected welfare indicators, children below five years. A high number implies a high risk of disadvantage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables, categories</th>
<th>Not controlled for wealth</th>
<th>Controlled for wealth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No bed net</td>
<td>Wasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of child</td>
<td>1.07 ***</td>
<td>0.88 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of child (0=boy, 1=girl)</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural residence (0=urban, 1=rural)</td>
<td>3.04 ***</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Living with father, mother elsewhere</td>
<td>2.14 **</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Living with father, mother dead</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - Living with mother, father elsewhere</td>
<td>1.71 ***</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - Mother and father elsewhere</td>
<td>1.93 ***</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - Mother dead, father elsewhere</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - Living with mother, father dead</td>
<td>1.50 **</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 - Mother elsewhere, father dead</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 - Mother and father dead</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>3.69 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children (N)</td>
<td>10,772</td>
<td>9,511</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Category 1 (Living with both parents) is the reference category.
Since none of the 39 children in category 2 were wasted, calculations are not made for this category.
*** Significant at the 0.01 level
** Significant at the 0.05 level
* Significant at the 0.1 level

Use of mosquito nets shows some clear differences between the categories: Children in category 2 (living with father, mother absent) have the highest risk of sleeping unprotected from mosquitoes. The odds ratio is 2.62 per cent when compared with for children living with both parents (after controlling for wealth). Also children with both parents absent and children living with mother, father absent, have higher risks, with odds ratios of 1.89 and 1.51, respectively.
The risk of being wasted does not differ significantly between the categories, with one exception: Double orphans are far more exposed to wasting as children living with both parents (odds ratio 3.83 after controlling for wealth). This may be partly due to the fact that children in category 9 have a higher risk of having been infected by HIV/AIDS – with a corresponding risk of diseases that lead to wasting. This risk applies to every child whose mother was HIV-positive during pregnancy or breastfeeding\textsuperscript{23}. In the DHS, these children cannot be identified directly, but double orphans are particularly likely to have lost their mother to AIDS because this disease often spreads from one spouse to the other, eventually taking both lives (UNAIDS, 2004).

4.1.2 The oldest children

For the oldest children, the logistic regression analysis gives the results shown in table 7.

**Table 7 Odds ratio estimates for being disadvantaged according to selected welfare indicators. Children 5–14 years. A high number implies a high risk of disadvantage.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables, categories</th>
<th>Not controlled for wealth</th>
<th>Controlled for wealth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No bed net</td>
<td>Not in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of child</td>
<td>1.06 ***</td>
<td>0.82 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of child (0=boy, 1=girl)</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>0.86 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural residence (0=urban, 1=rural)</td>
<td>3.41 ***</td>
<td>2.25 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Living with father, mother elsewhere</td>
<td>1.33 *</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Living with father, mother dead</td>
<td>1.71 **</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - Living with mother, father elsewhere</td>
<td>1.48 ***</td>
<td>1.26 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - Mother and father elsewhere</td>
<td>1.52 ***</td>
<td>1.25 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - Mother dead, father elsewhere</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - Living with mother, father dead</td>
<td>1.77 ***</td>
<td>1.23 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 - Mother elsewhere, father dead</td>
<td>1.57 ***</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 - Mother and father dead</td>
<td>1.99 ***</td>
<td>1.35 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children (N)</td>
<td>18,160</td>
<td>16,606</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Category 1 – living with both parents – is the reference category. For the school variable, the age group is 6–14 years.

*** Significant at the 0.01 level
**  Significant at the 0.05 level
*   Significant at the 0.1 level

Children who do not live with their parents are at a significantly higher risk of not sleeping under a bed net (except for children in category 6) than children who live with both parents. Double

\textsuperscript{23} Crampin et al (2003) estimate from northern Malawi that with ten per cent of pregnant women HIV positive, approximately 18 per cent of under-five deaths in this population are attributable to HIV/AIDS due to vertical transmission. They also find that, in terms of physical well-being, the extended family in this society has not discriminated against surviving children whose parents have been ill or have died as a result of HIV/AIDS.
orphans (category 9) and children with dead mothers, living with their father (category 3) have a particularly high risk of sleeping without bed net. Compared with the results for the youngest children, bed net use among 5–14 year-olds seems to disfavour to a large extent children without both parents in the household, and particularly single or double orphans.

For school attendance, there are (after controlling for wealth) few statistically significant differences between children not living with both parents and those children who do. The fact that fewer children in categories 4, 5, and 7 (children living with only their mother, or with both parents absent) go to school, seems therefore to be connected to the fact that they normally live in less wealthy households (which, as noted earlier, may be partly because the father is absent).

However, double orphans (category 9) are disadvantaged when it comes to school attendance, also after controlling for household wealth. Although only 18 per cent of the double orphans do not attend school – the same percentage as the children living with both parents – the double orphans are older than the ones living with both parents and would be expected to attend school to a higher degree. When controlling for age, this disadvantage that was not apparent in table 4 becomes clear.

In other studies, sex of household head has proved to be an important factor in explaining children’s educational status (Lloyd and Blanc, 1995). To examine this question, I have analysed the situation for the foster children (table not shown), since the other categories already have been characterised by whether the mother or father (or both) are present. Even after controlling for the children’s age, sex, rural/urban residence and wealth, and also for the head of household’s age and education, there is a clear and significant positive effect of living in a female headed household. Foster children living in households headed by women have a 19.5 per cent higher odds of school attendance than similar foster children with a male household head (significant at a 0.01 level).

Double orphans are significantly worse off when it comes to child labour. Compared to other children of the same age, sex, urban/rural residence, and household wealth, they have 35 per cent higher odds of being exposed to child labour. This may indicate that there is a tendency in some households to treat these orphans as cheap labour, although the households are not necessarily very poor.

24 However, Pullum’s study (2008) on orphans in Malawi shows that, even after several controls, double orphans and paternal orphans who do not drop out of school, are more likely than non-orphans to advance fast within the school system. Thus, there seems to be two partially contradictory effects: A lower likelihood of attendance, but faster progress if attending school.
4.1.3 Summary – parents’ presence

To the extent that children’s welfare can be measured using indicators of household wealth, nutrition, education, and mosquito net use, there seems to be certain differences between children according to whether they live with their parents or not, and whether their parents are alive or not.

Children living with their mother only, their father being absent or dead, generally live in poorer households and have a higher risk of sleeping without a bed net than the children living with both parents.

Children living with their father only belong to more wealthy households, but they still suffer from lesser use of mosquito nets than do the children with both parents around, even without controlling for wealth. There is thus a strong net effect counteracting the wealth effect. The oldest children with a dead mother, living with their father, are also less often in school.

The children with no parents in the household – the foster children – live in households almost as wealthy as children living with both parents. Among the foster children, one group is particularly disadvantaged: The double orphans are more often wasted, and when they are older they more seldom go to school, more seldom sleep under mosquito nets, and are more exposed to child labour. Children with both parents absent, particularly the youngest ones, more often sleep without bed nets than do children living with both their parents. Also the other foster children are somewhat disadvantaged when measured by bed net use, while other indicators do not point clearly towards a reduced welfare for these children.

To summarize: Parents’ presence matters. Children with both parents around are generally better off in terms of welfare than other children. Possible reasons for this are discussed in chapter 5.

4.2 The welfare of migrants’ children

The migrant’s children seem, from table 5, to be more often wasted than other children living with their mother. On the other hand, the migrants’ children seem more advantaged than the other groups when it comes to school attendance and getting medical treatment when ill.

Controlling for differences in background variables, are there still any welfare differences between migrants’ children and others? This is investigated below, and since I primarily want to examine the situation for migrants’ children, they will constitute the reference category. As shown in chapter 2, there are regional differences in the Malawian migration pattern, so regions will be controlled for in this section – South being an arbitrarily chosen reference category. And since all
information from the women’s questionnaire is now usable, I have included mothers’ education (in years) as an additional background variable, as mothers’ education can play an important role in improving children’s health, education and other measures of welfare.

4.2.1 The youngest children

For the youngest children, the results from the logistic regression analyses are shown in table 8.

**Table 8** Odds ratio estimates for being disadvantaged according to selected welfare indicators. Children below five years, living with their mother. A high number implies a high risk of disadvantage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not controlled for wealth</th>
<th>Controlled for wealth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wasted</td>
<td>No bed net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.88 ***</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of child</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0=boy, 1=girl</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0=urban, 1=rural</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern region</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central region</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s education</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>**</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father in house-</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hold</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents divorced</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>***</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father dead</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>**</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                  | Wasted | No bed net | Diarrhoea | Coughing | Diarrhoea non-treatment | Coughing non-treatment |
|                  | 0.88 | 1.07 | 0.69 | 0.86 | 1.08 | 1.07 ** |
|                  | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** |
|                  | 0.87 | 0.95 | 0.88 | 0.91 | 1.14 | 1.09 |
|                  | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** |
|                  | 0.88 | 1.53 | 1.17 | 1.50 | 1.15 | 1.34 ** |
|                  | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** |
|                  | 0.90 | 1.36 | 0.56 | 0.89 | 2.85 | 1.73 |
|                  | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** |
|                  | 0.56 | 1.57 | 1.44 | 0.96 | 1.80 | 1.17 |
|                  | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** |
|                  | 0.97 | 0.90 | 1.00 | 1.02 | 0.93 | 0.95 |
|                  | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** |
|                  | 0.92 | 0.75 | 0.94 | 0.96 | 1.07 | 0.90 |
|                  | * | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** |
|                  | 0.68 | 0.56 | 0.93 | 1.08 | 1.36 | 1.38 |
|                  | * | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** |
|                  | 0.43 | 1.21 | 1.02 | 1.21 | 1.38 | 1.79 |
|                  | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** |
|                  | 0.34 | 0.92 | 1.14 | 1.10 | 2.10 ** | 1.67 |
|                  | * | * | * | * | * | * |
|                  | 7,980 | 8,750 | 8,738 | 8,736 | 1,976 | 3,412 |

The last two columns include only children who had diarrhoea or were coughing. Medical treatment includes taking the child to health facilities, but does not include visits to pharmacy, medicine shop or traditional practitioner.

Reference groups: Migrants’ children and Southern region

*** Significant at the 0.01 level
** Significant at the 0.05 level
* Significant at the 0.1 level

After controls for background variables, migrants’ children are still observed at higher risk of wasting than all the other groups, and at a higher risk of sleeping without bed net than children with both parents in the household. There are no significant differences between migrants’
children and the other groups regarding diarrhoea and coughing. Migrants’ children are, however, found to have a lower risk than the other groups when it comes to receiving medical treatment for these diseases.

### 4.2.2 The oldest children

For the oldest children, a logistic regression analysis similar to the one for the youngest children has been performed. The results are shown in table 9.

**Table 9** Odds ratio estimates for being disadvantaged according to selected welfare indicators. Children 5–14 years, living with their mother. A high number implies a high risk of disadvantage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not controlled for wealth</th>
<th>Controlled for wealth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not in school</td>
<td>No bed net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.75 ***</td>
<td>1.05 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of child</td>
<td>0.82 ***</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>1.89 ***</td>
<td>2.13 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern region</td>
<td>0.47 ***</td>
<td>1.36 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central region</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.68 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s education</td>
<td>0.82 ***</td>
<td>0.85 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father in household</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.72 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents divorced</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.78 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father dead</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.70 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>9,096</td>
<td>10,201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the school indicator, five years old children are excluded from the sample.
Reference groups: Migrants’ children and Southern region

*** Significant at the 0.01 level
** Significant at the 0.05 level
* Significant at the 0.1 level

After controlling for age, sex, wealth, region, mother’s education, and urban/rural residence, the migrants’ children appear to be somewhat better off than the other groups for a slight majority of the variables. However, none of these differences are significant at the 0.01 level. At the 0.05 and 0.1 level, there are some significant differences in bed net use, where the migrants’ children seem better off than the children with divorced parents or dead fathers, but worse off than children with both parents around.
4.2.3 Summary – migrants’ children

How does the welfare of migrants’ children differ from the welfare of other children living with their mother? This study has shown some tendencies:

- The migrants’ children are generally younger than children in other groups. They have more educated mothers, and they live in almost as wealthy households as children with both parents.
- Welfare disadvantages for the migrants’ children include higher risk of wasting and – compared to children living with both parents – less use of mosquito net.
- On the other hand, the migrants’ children are more often than any other group given medical treatment when they are ill, and there are some advantages in bed net use compared with children whose parents are divorced or whose father is dead.
- Measured by coughing, diarrhoea, school attendance, and child labour, there are no significant differences between the migrants’ children and other groups.

Does this mean that migration is positive or negative for the children left behind? As shown above, that depends on which welfare indicators we are emphasizing. It also depends on who we compare the migrants’ children with.

The migrants’ children would probably have been living with both parents had it not been for the migration. On the other hand, there must have been a reason for the migration, like poverty, unemployment, and/or better opportunities elsewhere, which does not apply to the same extent to households where the father is still there. Households where the father decides to migrate could be different from other households with two parents, and these differences may be correlated with children’s welfare. External events that helped determine the decision to migrate may have a direct impact on the welfare of the children. Hence, we may have a selection mechanism which makes migrant households and household with both parents not necessarily comparable.

And while there may be clear similarities between the everyday life of migrants’ children and those whose father is dead or parents are divorced, most migrants’ children would probably not belong to either of these groups if the father had not migrated.
5. Discussion

Children in Malawi not living with both parents do seem to be somewhat disadvantaged compared to the ones with both parents in the household. The double orphans are particularly worse off when measured on several of the selected indicators. Children living with their mothers only live in the poorest households, but differences exist among these: The migrants’ children have a higher welfare than do children with divorced parents or a dead father.

How may these findings be explained? In this chapter, I will use some of the factors presented in chapter two to illuminate the welfare differences between the categories and groups. Furthermore, I will draw some policy implications of the results.

5.1 Possible explanations of the findings

The fact that both parents are not there to provide love and care may be one of the main explanations why children with both parents around fare better on most of the indicators examined above. But there may also be others reasons.

Other guardians of the child may not feel the same commitment towards the child’s welfare. This may be some of the reason why double orphans to a larger extent are exposed to child labour and stay out of school, even more than other foster children (which may be explained by the fact that no parents are alive and thus potentially able to control how the child is treated).

There may also be a difference between taking care of somebody else’s child for a short period or taking the full responsibility for an orphan, which could possibly explain some of the difference in mosquito net use for the youngest children, where children with one or both parent elsewhere are most at risk – an extra mosquito net may not be bought if the household is only taking care of the child for a shorter period.

When comparing the different groups of children who live with their mother, the children of divorced or dead fathers may have step fathers or other relatives in the household who favours their own children. Since mothers married to migrants do not marry new men, this factor may explain some of the difference between migrants’ children and others not living with their father.

Parental death or divorce may itself be a traumatic event. This factor would indicate that children with a dead father or divorced parents have a lower welfare than migrants’ children and children with both parents in the household – which is supported by this study.
The loss of an economically active parent may worsen the household’s economy. This factor can explain much of the wealth disadvantage for children living with their mother only. In Malawi, the men are usually the bread winners, and the loss of his income will in most instances affect the household’s ability to provide the children with basic necessities like proper housing, food, clothes as well as mosquito nets, school equipment, and health services.

While migrants’ children still have an economically active father who may remit money home, this factor applies mostly to children with divorced or dead fathers, and contributes to explain why these two groups are disadvantaged.

The child may experience stigma. As shown, it is not unusual for children in Malawi to live with others than their parents – divorce, migration and polygamy is not uncommon. The stigma factor for not living with both a mother and a father is thus probably not very prominent in this society, perhaps with the exception of AIDS orphans. In 2004, strong stigmas were still attached to losing a parent to HIV/AIDS. This factor may thus apply mostly to children with dead parents, and particularly to the double orphans who are at higher risk of having lost a parent to HIV/AIDS. These children are also at higher risk of having been infected with the virus, which may explain the higher prevalence of wasting among double orphans.

On the other hand, for many indicators, most categories show no significant disadvantage for children in Malawi not living with both their mother and father. It is perhaps more surprising that these children are not more disadvantaged than this study shows. After all, most Malawian households live in deep poverty. Malawi is the seventh poorest country in the world measured in GDP/capita²⁵ – only the war-torn or badly ruled countries Burma, Liberia, Somalia, Eritrea, DR Congo, and Burundi are poorer. The extended families in Malawi take care not only of a large number of HIV/AIDS orphans, but also provide care for other children who have lost their parents, as well as children of migrants and children whose parents are away for other reasons. As Chirwa (2004) points out in a study on orphan care in Malawi, “(f)amily relations are becoming more elastic and are sometimes over-stretched to accommodate the vulnerable members.”

Certainly, some of the disadvantages may not be captured by the indicators used here. Although psychological factors like love, care, and compassion from adults may manifest themselves in children’s nutritional status, the use of mosquito nets and the school attendance, the child’s feelings of loss, sorrow and loneliness are nonetheless hard to measure in a survey like this.
There are, however, factors in Malawian society mitigating the negative effects of parental absence. Several of the factors from chapter two that indicate better welfare from not living with both parents, may be at work. One of the most important is that **the child may be left with someone who cares well for it.** The extended family plays an important role in Malawian child care, and children are often placed in the households best able to take care of yet another child. In cases of a mother’s death, it is normally the maternal uncle, often in consultation with the village head, who decides in which family the orphan is to be placed. This may explain why the foster children do not normally live in the poorest households. However, the wealthiest households may not always be the ones best suited to take care of a child’s more emotional needs, and Mann notes from his studies on orphans in Malawi in 2002 that “(w)hile adults emphasised the material capacity of a family to take in an orphaned child, children placed more emphasis on being cared for by adults who would love them” – which often meant that the children would rather stay with their grandparents even if they were poor.

This factor may also partly explain why migrants’ children are better off than for instance children with a dead father: The decision of one or both parents to migrate and leave children behind, may be the result of some utility maximization by the households or extended families, also taking into account the welfare of the children. A father’s death is not a result of such a decision making process – which indicates that children with dead fathers may be at higher risk of living with someone who does not take well care of them.

Another mitigating factor may be **remittances from parents working somewhere else.** This can improve the household’s economy and also benefit the child. Remittances are probably the main reason why the migrants’ children live in wealthier households than children with divorced parents and dead fathers. The fact that migrants’ children have a higher school attendance and are taken more often to health facilities when sick, also supports the hypothesis that remittances are subject to some mental accounting, where a larger part of these money are used for the children’s education and health\textsuperscript{26}.

**Parental migration may expose the child to new ideas.** The influx of new ideas and new information about the world may stimulate the migrants’ children’s education and thus explain some of the increased school attendance. If the migrant fathers are more educated than the average father – which is not unlikely as their wives are more educated than other mothers – they

\textsuperscript{25} CIA Factbook 2008, nominal GDP/capita.

\textsuperscript{26} Although primary school and health care are basically free of charge in Malawi, there are still costs associated with school uniforms and school equipment as well as transport to health facilities and opportunity costs of leaving work to take the child there.
may want to make sure their children also go to school. Children of migrants may also benefit emotionally by staying in some kind of long distance contact with their mother or father, and they may be stimulated by new ideas and knowledge of opportunities. This study’s findings actually suggest that migrants’ children have the highest school attendance.

**Inheritance.** When a father dies, his belongings may stay in the household. When parents divorce, the household’s belongings are often shared between them. This indicates a lower wealth among children with divorced parents – which is also shown in this study.

This study indicates that in most cases, with a possible exception for migrants’ children, the disadvantages of parents’ absence outweigh the advantages. For migrants’ children, remittances (tied to some mental accounting which supports the child’s education and health), as well as other benefits of parental migration and a higher chance of being left with someone who takes well care of them, may offset the drawback of having one less parent around to provide love, care and support.

In a larger perspective, however, some additional points should be provided:

Even if this study shows no clear disadvantage for children whose father migrate, migration may increase the strain on a system of support from the extended family, a system that is already stretched to accommodate other vulnerable children. In one way, migrants’ children, particularly those with two migrant parents, use some of the resources and capacity that orphans and other children left by their parents could have benefitted from.

Migrants have also experienced a higher risk of being infected by HIV/AIDS (Brummer, 2002), thus increasing the risk of orphaning their children. The left behind mothers may also be exposed to an increased risk of extramarital HIV infection. Long term migration may lead to disruptions of the families. And migrant men sometimes have affairs with other women while away from their family, thus increasing the risk of creating children in other places, who may thus grow up with single mothers.

On the other hand, remittances from migrants may support the extended family, making it capable of supporting even more children. Remittances may also, as it helps reducing poverty in a country, increase the chances of parental survival and decrease the need to migrate from severe poverty – thus reducing the number of vulnerable children to be taken care of.
5.2 Policy implications

Some policy implications may be drawn from this study. First, when targeting vulnerable children in Malawi, it is important to bear in mind that this group consists of much more than AIDS orphans. The HIV/AIDS crisis in Malawi has definitely increased the number of orphans, and Malawi’s national policy on orphans and vulnerable children (Government of Malawi, 2003) as well as most donor interventions are mostly concerned with the situation for these AIDS orphans. Still, 83 per cent of the children living with neither of their parents have at least one parent alive, and 60 per cent have both parents alive but in a different place. Family disruption probably causes far more parental absence in Malawi than does HIV/AIDS. Although the double orphans are disadvantaged when measured in wasting, school attendance, and child labour, others are more disadvantaged when it comes to household wealth and young children sleeping without mosquito nets. The fact that the vulnerable children in Malawi are a more diverse group than orphans alone, implies that it can be difficult to target support directly to this group. A better approach could be to reduce the costs of caring for children in general, i.e. costs related to children’s education and health. This would also make it easier to place children with those people who are best able to meet their nonmaterial needs. Support directed to female headed households would help children living under less wealthy conditions. If such support enables a woman to take care of children she would otherwise not be able to care for, this may also contribute positively to school attendance as female household heads more often send the children to school. And of course, economic growth and poverty reduction in general may ease the burdens placed on extended family systems.

Second, by considering increased migration as an instrument for development, it is important to also consider the costs connected with leaving children behind. Although migrant’s children seem to have a higher welfare than other children living without their father, and on some indicators even a higher welfare than children with both parents around, it may be worth discussing whether migration will put additional strain on the extended families, which are already over-stretched to care for AIDS orphans and other vulnerable children.
6. Summary

In Malawi, four in ten children under 15 years do not live with both their parents. There are a number of reasons why children do not live with both or any of their parents – like migration, parental divorce, polygamy, HIV/AIDS and death due to other causes. Several instances try to reach the most vulnerable children in Malawi with different forms of support. For this support to be effective, it is important to know where the largest problems are, what they consist of, and how they may be dealt with.

Studies on vulnerable children in Malawi have so far concentrated mainly on the situation for orphans, and particularly those orphaned by AIDS. Children living apart from one or both of their parents for other reasons have not been subject to the same academic interest. These children constitute a much bigger group.

Some of the children with absent parents are children left behind by migrants, a phenomenon that has drawn some attention over the last years. Whether parental migration is good for children or not, is a controversial question. On the one hand, parents are normally assumed to be the ones best able to provide the love and care that a child needs. On the other hand, remittances from migration can enable a household to pay for a child’s education and health care, which is an advantage for the child. The situation for Malawian children left behind by migrants has not, as far as I know, been studied before.

This study has examined how the welfare of Malawian children is associated with whether they live with their parents or not. Without claiming to estimate a causal effect or provide a basis for recommendations of appropriate strategies at an individual level, I have examined how the relationship between co-residence with parents and indicators of child welfare could be explained. The children’s welfare has been measured by indicators on health, education and child labour obtained from the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2004, and analysed using logistic regression models.

Although the DHS does not ask directly about parental migration, this study has also estimated the welfare effect of having a migrant father.

The research questions have been as follows:

- What is the relationship between Malawian children’s welfare and whether their mothers and fathers are dead, living somewhere else, or living in the household?
What are the welfare differences between children whose father is a migrant and other children?

There are three main contributions from this study.

First, parents’ presence does matter. By examining the situation for children in Malawi not living with both parents, it has been shown that children living with both parents usually have a higher welfare, measured in weight-for-height, mosquito net use, and school attendance, compared to children with one or both parents absent. Although the double orphans are clearly disadvantaged in some aspects, they are not the only vulnerable children identified in this study, and they constitute only a small proportion of children living without parents. Strategies targeting vulnerable children in Malawi should thus take into consideration also other categories of children, for instance the ones living with their mother only.

Second, it has been demonstrated how the DHS, which is a survey conducted in most developing countries, can be used to investigate the situation for migrants’ children, even if the DHS does not ask questions on migration directly.

Third, using this methodology, the situation for Malawian children of migrant men has been examined. Compared with other children also living with their mother, but whose parents are divorced or whose father has died, the migrants’ children are found to be more often wasted, but they more often get medical treatment when ill and more often sleep under a mosquito net. Compared with children living with both parents, the migrants’ children are more observed to be more often wasted and less often sleep under a mosquito net. They are, however, taken more often to medical facilities when they are coughing. The overall impression is that the migrants’ children have almost the same welfare as children living with both parents, whereas children with dead fathers or divorced mothers appear to have a slightly lower welfare.
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