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# Levels, trends and determinants of family structure in Malawi

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## ABSTRACT

**Abstract:** Nowhere has the family's important role in ensuring optimal development of people been seriously put into disrepute. Since time immemorial, the family has endured the impact of socioeconomic and political challenges and it is still regarded as pivotal in the development of cultures and nations (Emran, 2009). Apart from reproduction, socialization, production, consumption, accumulation and social networking, and care for vulnerable groups, families are important in intergenerational transfers such as material, cultural values and social capital. In spite of these notable values, modernization and industrialization continue to alter the traditional systems leading to emergence of new family forms. Malawi has one of the highest rates of single families, within the Sub-Saharan Africa region, especially among women, with a rate as high as 61% by the time a woman reaches 45 years of age. Further, about 56% of children under the age of 15 were not co-resident with both parents. Unstable families are associated with several wider negative outcomes such as poor economic and health outcomes to individual, communities and nations at large. Despite such challenges, it is surprising that little attention has been paid to fully analyse factors that are causing such changes in the family. Thus, the aim of this paper was to identify the levels and trends and assesses the demographic, socioeconomic and cultural factors associated with family structure in Malawi between 2000 and 2010. The study was motivated by inadequate literature and scientific knowledge on the scope of the impacts of different factors which have caused changes to family arrangements over time.

**Study Method**: Two data sets were employed in this study. These data sets were extracted from the Malawi Demographic Heath Survey for the year 2000 and 2010. The unit of analysis was women aged 15-49 years of age from different households. In order to identify trends, the Chi2 square test was used. As for measuring the association between the various demographic and socioeconomic factors and family structure, the Multinomial Logistic Regression model was used.

**Results:** The study reveals that there was a 2.5% increase in the rate of single families between 2000 and 2010. Further, the inferential results shows that age of household head is statistically associated with changing family structure in Malawi in the year(s) 2000 and 2010 for both the

nuclear and extended family categories (p-value 0.000). In addition, being in the age bracket (25-39) has a higher statistical associtionwith changing family structure in both 2000 and 2010 (p-value 0.000). Further, belonging to households headed by a female is statistcially associted with family structure in 2000 and 2010 for both nuclear and extended family (p-value 0.000).

The results also show that being a Muslim woman is statistically associated with family structure in 2010 (p-value 0.039) but not in 2000. In terms of education, having primary and secondary education is statiscally asocited with family strcuture [primary: 2000 and 2010 (p-value 0.000 for both) secondary: 2000 and 2010 (p-value 0.001 for both). As for residence, residing in rural area is statistically associated with family structure in Malawi (2000 (nuclear: p-value 0.000; extended: p-value 0.028) and 2010 (nuclear: p-value 0.006; extended: 0.013).

As for wealth, the results show that having middle and richer wealth quintile is statistically associated with family structure in 2010 for both nuclear and extended families (p-value 0.000) but not in 2000. Similarly, women in employment is statistcially associated with family strcuture for nuclear and extended family categories (p-value 0.000 for both 2000 and 2010). Lastly, the results also show that having few children (1-2), average number of children (3-4) and many children (5 and above) is statistically associated with family structure in the extended family category only (p-value 0.000).

**Conclusions:** The study reveals that single families are on the increase while nuclear and extended families are decreasing. Policy and programmes to the wider sectors such as; HIV/AIDS, gender, reproductive health and education should be directed to the family if Malawi is to achieve health, and socioeconomic grown which are some of the key areas of interest in achieving the sustainable development goals.