

# Effects of Women's Autonomy on Divorce: Evidence from Rural Malawi

Kim Deslandes, Université de Montréal

Population Association of America Annual Meeting  
Boston, MA, 1-3 May 2014

Women's lower autonomy has been considered an outcome of control men have over them. This may stem from couples' dynamics and social norms set by attitudes and acceptable behaviors associated with marriage. However, women have developed marital strategies to free themselves from controlling family members or partners. This study examines whether specific marital patterns used by women in sub-Saharan Africa are associated with greater autonomy. We identify women in their first union and estimate discrete-time survival models. Age at first divorce is the outcome and autonomy measured at wave prior to the first divorce is the main independent variable. Autonomy is represented by an index constructed from questions on five dimensions (mobility, acceptability of divorce, of domestic violence, of coerced sex, and negotiation of safer sex). We expect that women who experienced divorce had a higher autonomy score at the previous survey wave after controlling for factors associated to divorce.