

Paper submitted:

**THE DEATH OF PARENTS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON
CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN BURKINA FASO:
An Indirect Way to Evaluate the Strength of the Extended Family System**

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Background and objectives

Sub-Saharan Africa is well known for the importance of its traditional solidarity, specially through an extended family system which offer to its members, in particular children, support in terms of education, health or others social issues. As Lloyd and Blanc (1996, p. 268) have emphasized it, "*In an extended family system, parenting is a shared responsibility and children grow up with more than one "mother" and/or more than one "father"*". "*This larger circle of relationships [they continued] brings children both benefits (in terms of additional support and protection from loss in case of the death of either or both parents) and cost (in terms of additional future responsibilities)*" (Lloyd and Blanc, *ibid.*). *Fostering* which is the practice of delegating to other relatives the partial or full responsibility for a child's rearing, is one of the way by which the support of the solidarity system operates (Lloyd et Gage-Brandon, 1994, p. 294).

These statements about the role of the extended family system for the care and support to children in Sub-Saharan Africa, which have been underlined by others authors (e.g. Antoine and Guillaume, 1986; Desai, 1992...) means that even in case of death of one or both parents, a child's school trajectory must not be disturbed. A result which confirms this assumption and mentioned by Lloyd and Blanc (1996, p. 269) is a study conducted in northwestern Tanzania (Ainsworth and Koda, 1993) that "*show that children who have experienced the loss of a parent were no more likely to be out of school than other children*".

But in a context of declining standards of living as it is the case in many Sub-Saharan Africa countries experiencing, since one or two decades, the consequences of drastic economic policies as the Structural Adjustment Programs, one can expect the family system to be unable to come up to all the expectations from the extended family members, in particular to afford for orphans' needs. In a recent study from Cameroon, Wakam (2002), analyzing the effect of the economic crisis on the orphans' schooling, found out that the situation has become worse, particularly for children who have lost both parents.

Since 1991, a Structural Adjustment Program is ongoing in Burkina Faso and in January 1994, countries of Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa (which include Burkina Faso) have experienced a devaluation of their currency by the rate of 50 %. All these factors have contributed to make worse the standards of living of the most part of the population. In such a context, we assume that the family network can't afford for all its members' needs, and consequently the more vulnerable members as orphans are more likely to suffer from this situation.

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the effect of parents' death on a child's educational attainment. Specially we expect that the death of parents is more likely to lead to school drop-outs in the last decade (that is in the 1990s) than in the anterior decades (that is before 1990). Others issues we want to explore are the differences when it is a father's death, a mother's death or both parents' death, the differences when comparing boys and girls and the differences when comparing rural and urban areas.

Data and methods

These issues will be addressed using event history data from a 2000 national representative survey that provided information on all the activities which length was at least 3 months since the 6th anniversary for almost 8 453 individuals aged at least 15 years old at the time of the survey. These activities include periods of schooling, so for those who entered school we know their age at school entry and for those who have dropped-out their age at dropping. The survey also asked for all the individuals their parents' survival status and for fatherless and/or motherless, their age at the parents' death. So it is possible to know for those who have dropped-out if the father's or mother's death comes before dropping. The data collected includes also an formation about whom (uncle, grand-parent or sibling) were the main support for the individual during each activity he has experienced. This information allows for the analysis of the difference in the timing of dropping-out after the parents' death according to the individual relationship to his main support.

The statistical method we'll use is one of the regression methods suitable for the analysis of longitudinal (or event history) data. One of these methods is the well-known Cox's semi-parametric model based on the idea of *life table*, a tool used by demographers. Since the date of all events (the dependant and the explanatory variables) are known, these statistical methods allow for a causal approach of social phenomena (Allison, 1984).

Expected findings

The principal findings we expect are the following:

1. A parent's death is more likely to lead to school drop-out in the era of Structural Adjustment (that is after 1991) than before the 1990s.
2. For a lot of social reasons dealing with gender issues, investments in children's education in Sub-Saharan Africa are generally more profitable for boys than girls. So we expect the impact of a parent's death to be more harmful for a girl's school trajectory than it is for a boy.

3. Since the strength of extended family system is supposed to be more important in rural area, we expect the impact of the parent's death to be more harmful in urban area than in rural area.
4. The death of both parents is the more injurious for a child's school trajectory but we expect the mother's death to be more injurious than the father's death, a result found by Wakam (2002), when using cross-national data from Cameroon.

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