

# The Effects of Women’s Attitudes Towards Divorce on Marital Instability in Rural Malawi

Kim Deslandes, Department of Demography

## Background

- The relationship between women’s autonomy and marriage is complex as marriage has become a way for some women to gain control over their lives.
- In some sub-Saharan African societies, there has been a shift away from traditional marital practices towards greater independence of women from family members.
- This shift suggests a change in attitudes and in cultural practices related to marriage and women’s autonomy.

## Main Research Question

Can specific domains of women’s attitude towards divorce be more important in predicting women’s likelihood of union dissolution than others?

## Main Findings

- Divorce rates vary greatly across regions due to different traditional practices and social norms found in rural Malawi.
- The generational effects in the survival rates of unions are likely explained by sample selectivity.
- Women who believe wife beating is a reason for divorce have the highest likelihood of experiencing a union dissolution; it is the opposite for women who suspect their husband to be infected with aids.
- Residential patterns after union and polygyny have strong effects on the odds of union dissolution

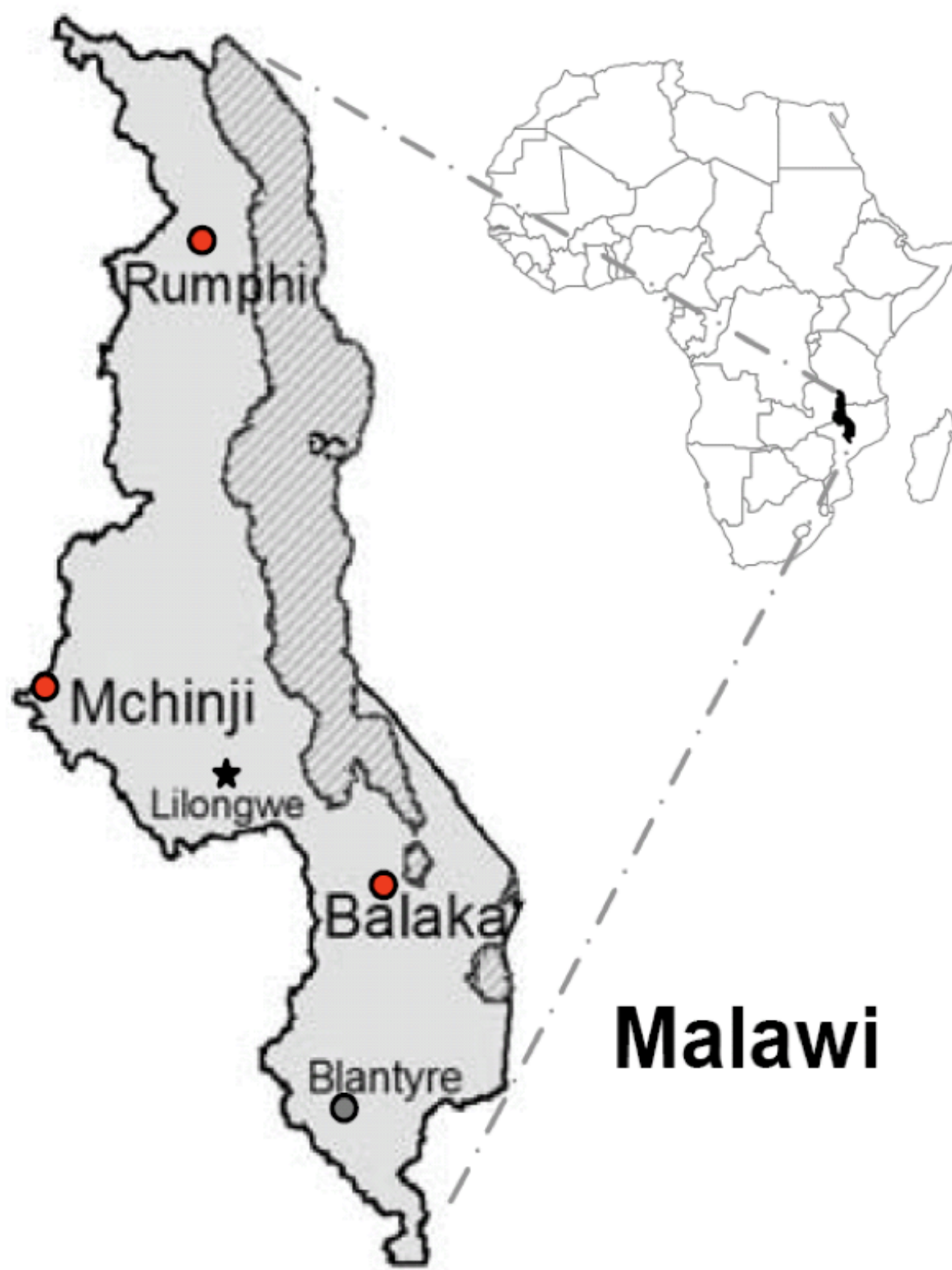
## Data

### Malawi Longitudinal Survey on Family and Health (MLSFH)

MLSFH is a large panel study on reproductive health, social networks, attitudes and behaviors surrounding HIV/AIDS and gender roles in three rural areas of Malawi.

Our analytical sample consists of all married women in their first union at the first survey wave in 1998.

Marital status at time of survey	1998	2008
	N	
Married	1336	
In their first union	<b>767</b>	<b>649</b>
Divorced or separated		<b>71</b>
Widowed		47

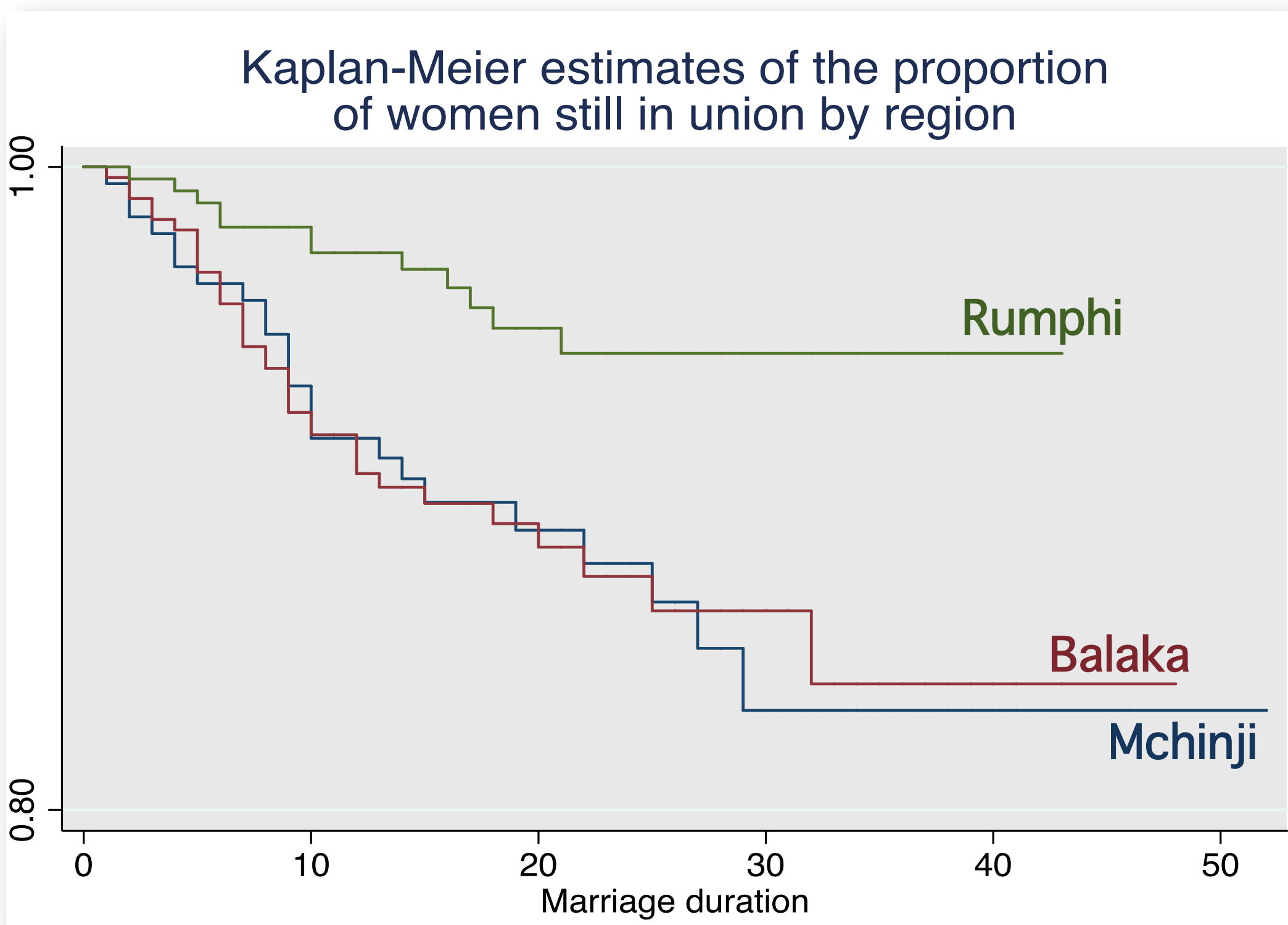
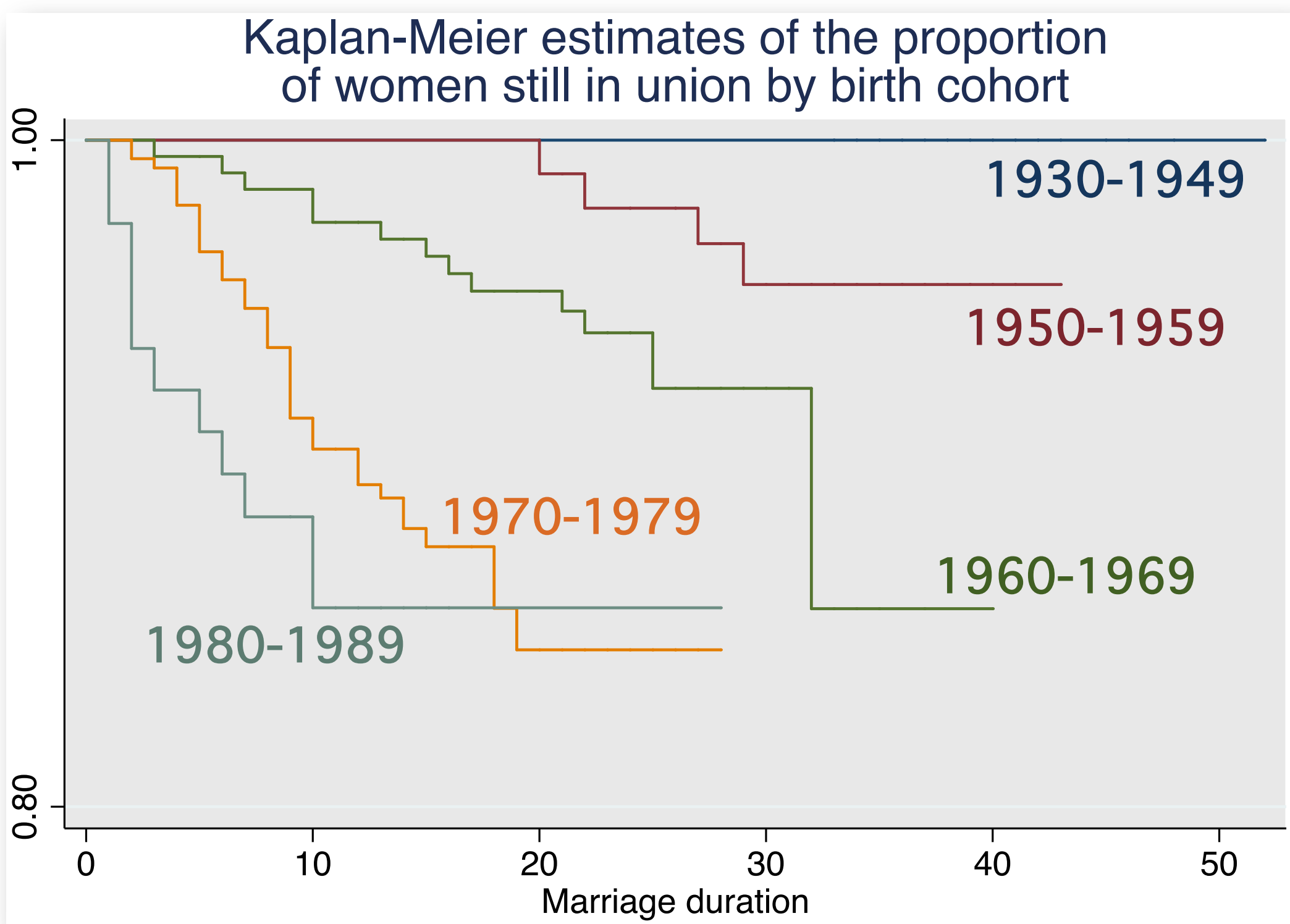


Women’s opinions on the acceptability of divorce are measured with five questions, asked at five waves from 1998 to 2008 :

Attitudes on acceptability of divorce at baseline (1998)	%
In your opinion, it is proper for a wife to leave her husband if:	
He does not support her and the children financially?	28.8
He beats her frequently?	70.1
He is sexually unfaithful?	66.0
She thinks he might be infected with AIDS?	15.1
He does not allow her to use family planning?	18.6

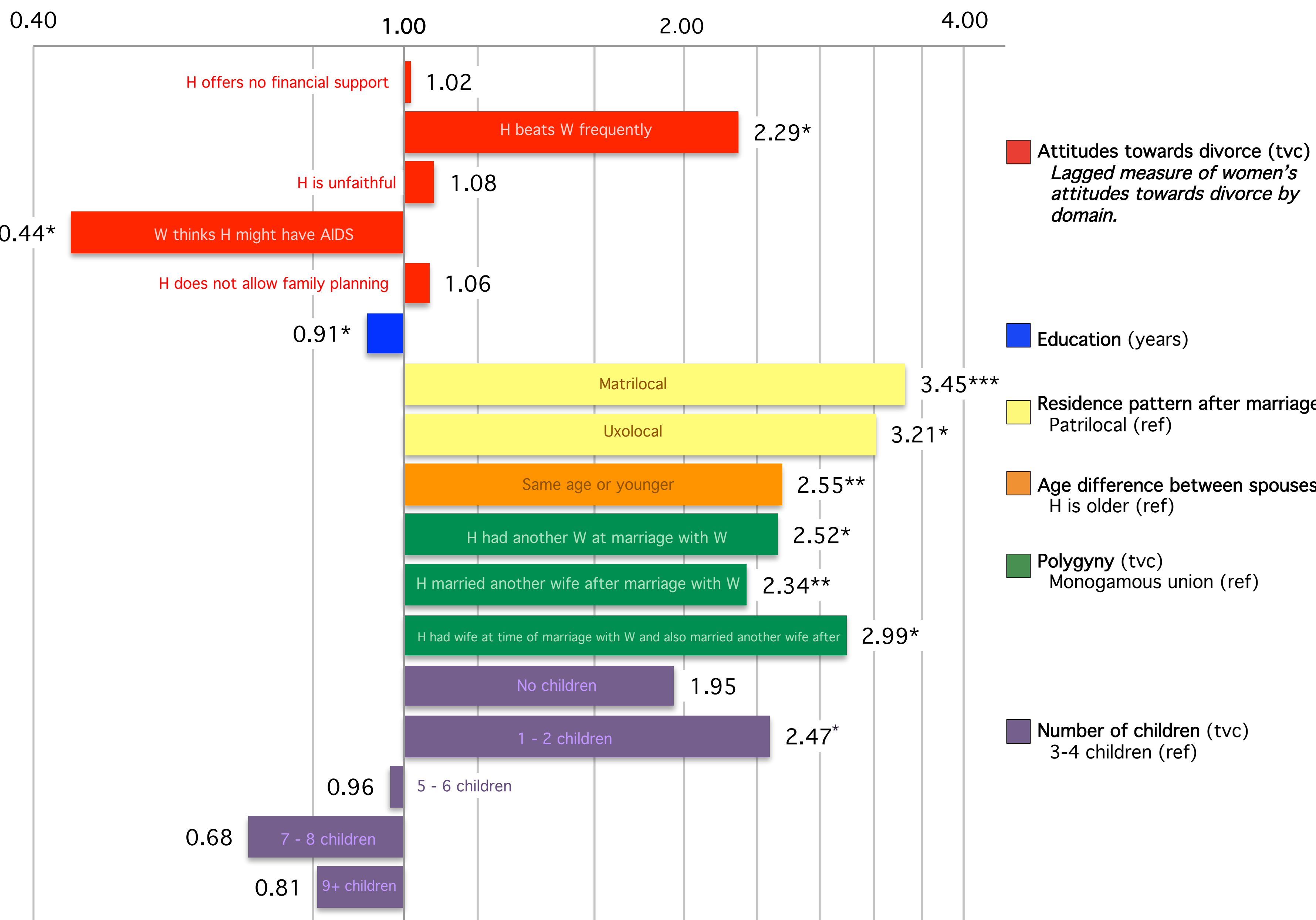
## Event-history analysis

- We use event history analysis in discrete-time with person-year data to model the risk of divorce over the period of observation (1998 to 2008).



## Logistic Regressions

- We present the odds ratios for discrete time logistic regressions.
- Dependent variable is the occurrence of a union dissolution.
- Main independent variables are domains on attitudes of women on divorce (lagged).
- Model also controls for: union duration (tvc), religion, region.



Legend: \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001    H: Husband; W: Wife    tvc: time-varying covariate