

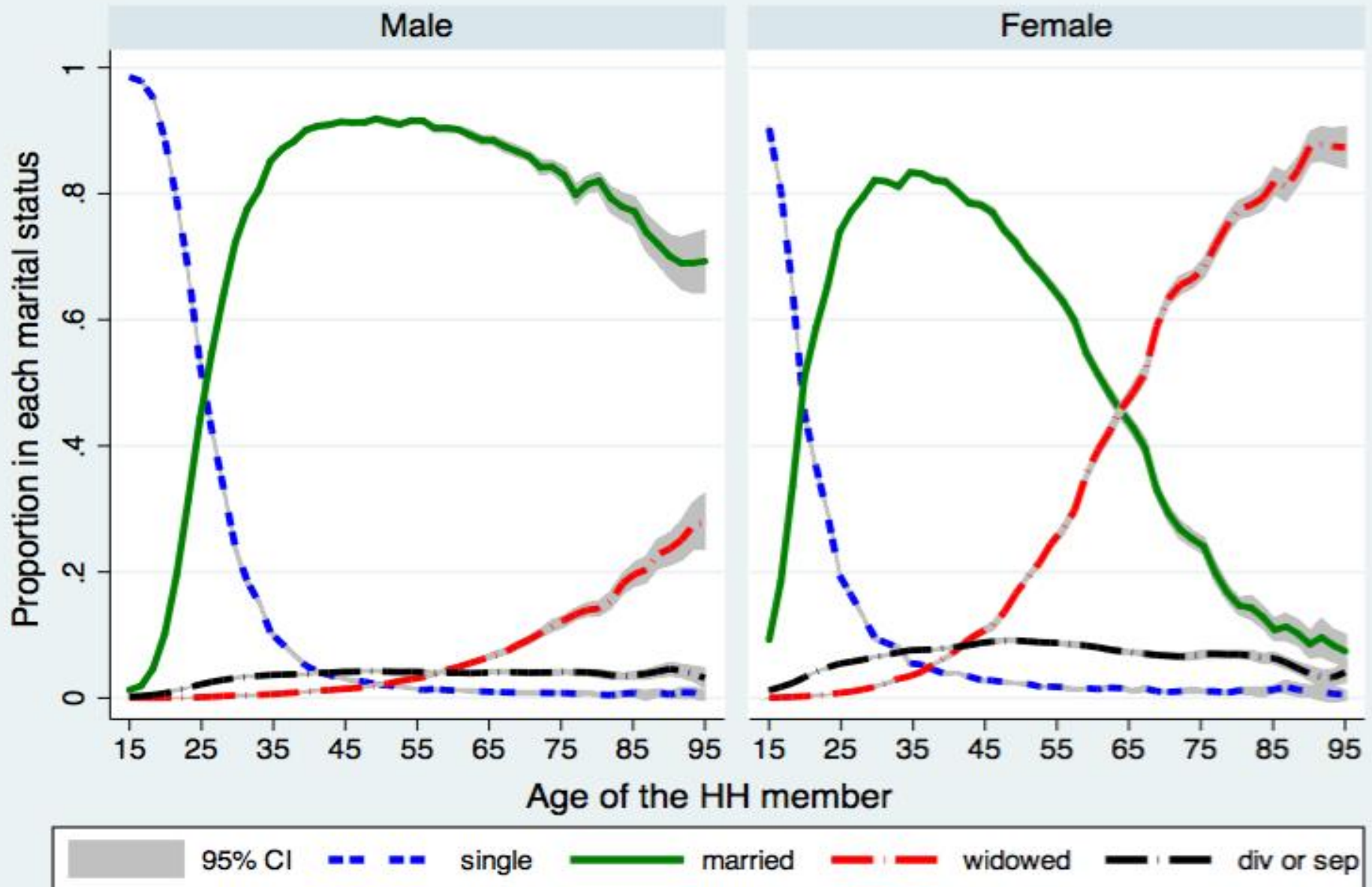
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Marital Shocks and Women's Welfare in Africa

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The marital experience is gendered in Africa



Prevalence of marital shocks

- Marital dissolution is frequent
 - Women marry young, and much older men
 - Women have higher average life expectancy
 - HIV/AIDS, conflict
- Far higher remarriage rates for men, aided by polygamy (legal in 25 countries)
 - Remarriage rates for women vary more.

Should social policies target women who have had a marital shock?

Implications for social policy depend on correlation not causality

- It may not be random that some women experience a marriage dissolution.
- For anti-poverty policy what matters is not whether widowhood or divorce *per se* cause disadvantage
- Rather, the policy issue is whether women who have had a marital dissolution are significantly worse off than those who have not, and thus a target group for social policy.
- Causality often unclear, but often irrelevant to policy

Key question: Are ever-widowed/divorced African women worse off than otherwise similar women in their first union?

Grounds for concern

- Widows were historically identified as a disadvantaged group in today's rich world
- But less policy attention in developing countries.
- India: widows are particularly discriminated against and destitute (Chen 2000, Drèze and Srinivasan 1997, Jensen 2005)
- Mixed evidence of negative economic and other consequences of divorce.

What evidence for Africa?

Evidence for Africa

- Zimbabwe, Uganda and Mali: Widow-headed households are especially poor (Horrell & Krishnan 2007; Appleton 1996; van de Walle 2013).
- ‘Lack of a husband’ accounts for some 35% of excess adult female mortality in Africa (Anderson & Ray 2015)
- Zambia, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa: widows of men who died of illness are most vulnerable to losing control of agricultural land (Chapoto et al. 2011; Drimie 2002).
- Evidence of responses to the risk of marital ruptures with consequences for broader societal welfare: Senegal (Lambert & Rossi 2016); Zambia (Dillon & Voena 2017)).
- Divorce: sparser literature suggests consequences for well-being likely to be more mixed (Reniers 2003; Clark & Hamplova 2013)

Evidence for Africa cont.

- Legal, human rights, sociology literatures, public opinion => poor treatment of widows: dehumanizing rituals, dispossession, land grabbing, loss of child custody etc.
- Underdeveloped public safety net & insurance mechanisms.
- Against that, there may be private support?
 - Large literature on informal solidarity, risk-sharing institutions, moral economy in peasant societies (Fafchamps 1992).
 - Child fostering as tool for risk sharing (Akresh 2005)
 - Levirate /polygamy.
- However, detailed country-case study or large-sample, population-representative empirical research on the consequences of marital dissolutions are scarce

Data are less than ideal: prevalence

- Prevalence of ever-widowed/ever-divorced is unknown
- Only current marital status is collected, not **marital histories**. Remarried widows and divorcees can not be distinguished from married-once women.
 - Micro-studies indicate lots of marital disruption.
 - Senegal: 19-22% of ever-married women have experienced widowhood; 13-17% divorce;
 - 7% of ever-married have had more than 1 breakup
 - Senegal study suggests that disadvantage for women & their offspring persists through remarriage.
 - DHS phase 3: data available for 20 countries for women 15-49.

% Widows & divorcees among African women

	Widowed			Divorced		
	Aged 15+	Aged 15-49	Ever	Aged 15+	Aged 15-49	Ever
	Current	Current		Current	Current	
West	9.3	2.2	4.3	3.0	2.9	9.5
Central	10.0	2.3	3.8	6.8	7.1	18.2
East	11.1	3.6	6.0	7.5	7.4	19.0
Southern	16.0	3.3	8.4	6.7	6.0	11.7
Africa	10.4	2.8	5.3	5.5	5.3	14.5

15+ : latest DHS for 29 countries; 15-49: DHS for 20 countries with marital histories.

Data are less than ideal: poverty

- Individual poverty measures are rarely available.
- Disadvantaged individuals **within the household** remain invisible in standard data sources
- One important dimension of individual welfare: **nutritional status**. Available for women 15-49 from DHS.
- Individualized measure of consumption for Senegal

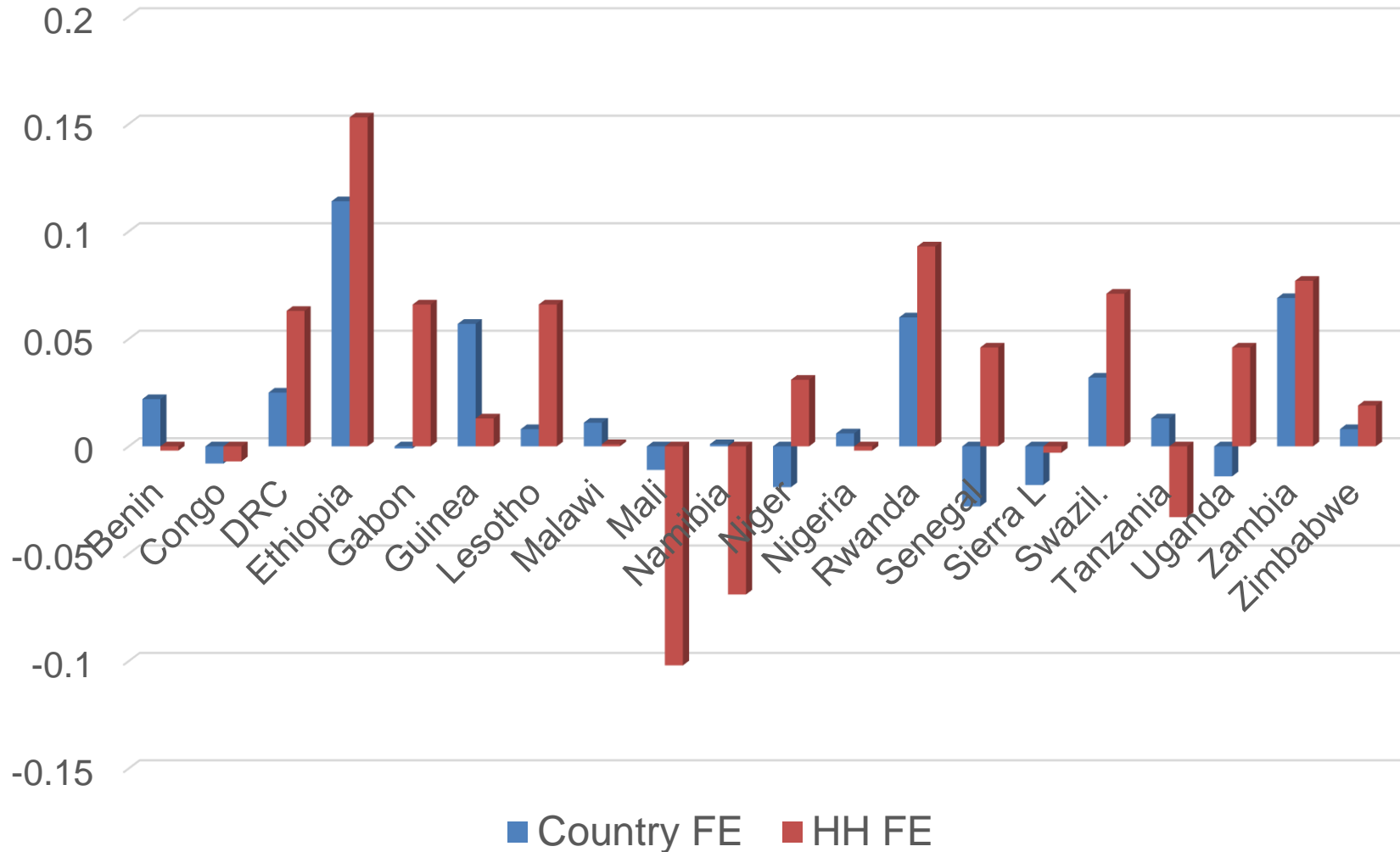
New evidence on well-being

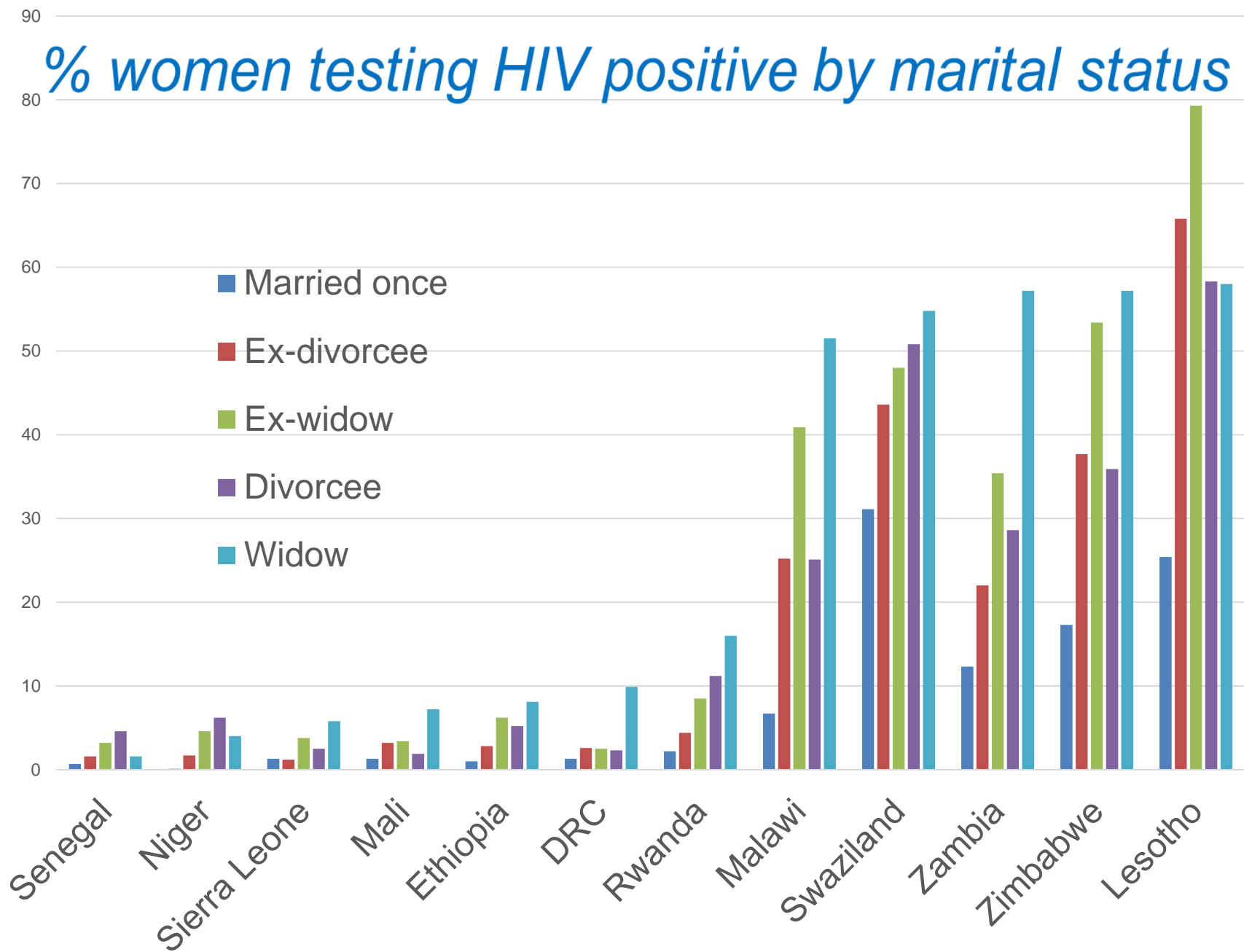
Conditional differences in nutritional status Africa-wide

- Pool DHS data for 20 countries
- Control for individual & household characteristics, country or household fixed effects
- To see whether **ever-widowed/divorced women** are nutritionally deprived relative to otherwise similar women in their first union.
- Current widows/divorcees are found to have statistically worse nutritional status indicators on average
 - Being a widow is associated with a 1.8 % points increase in the likelihood of being underweight; 2.4 % points in urban areas.
 - Being a divorcee raises the prob. of underweight by 1.4 percentage points.

Country-specific effects of widowhood on UW

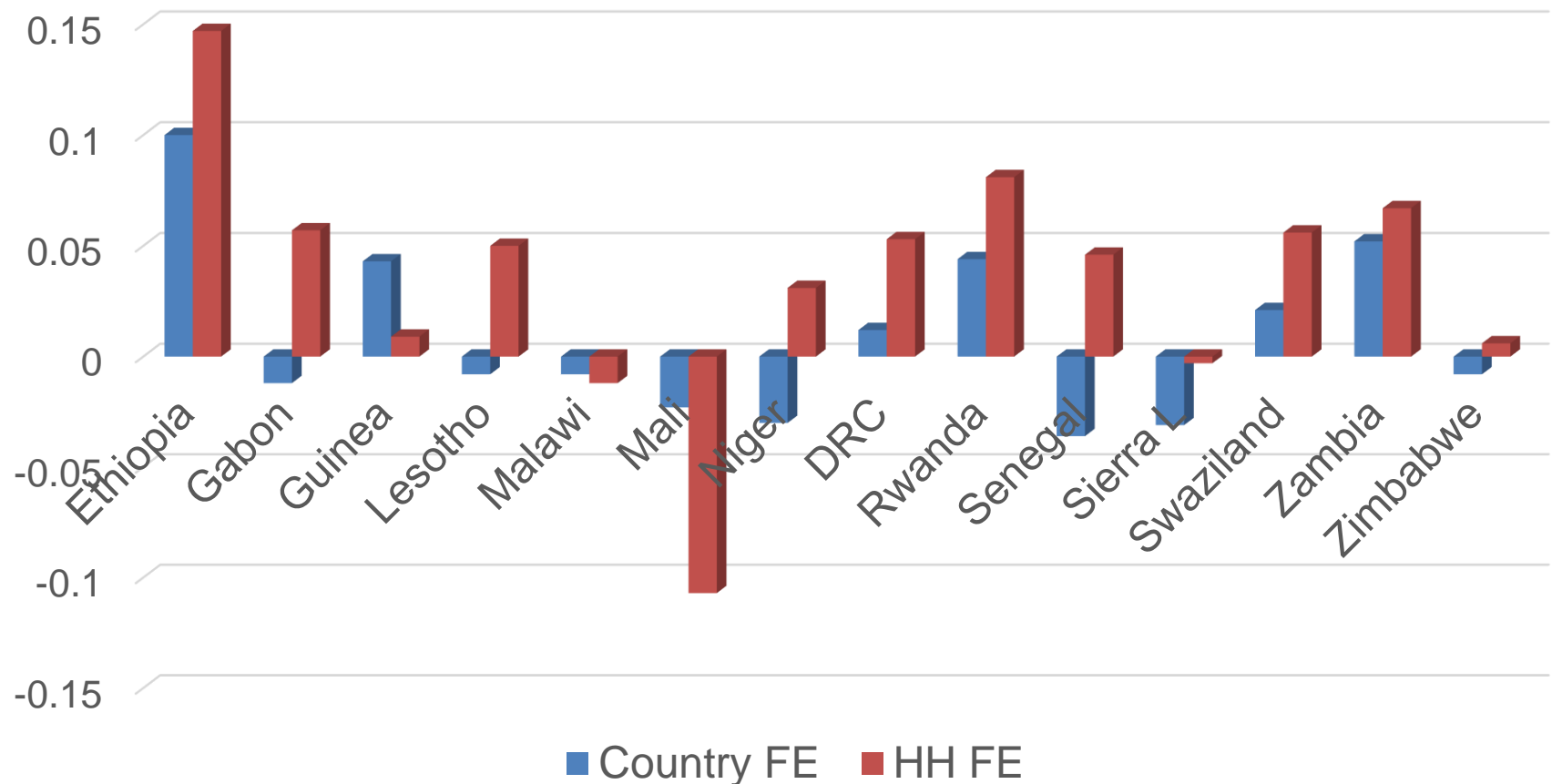
Regression coefficients on undernutrition of widowhood





Country-specific effects of widowhood on UW controlling for HIV status

Regression coefficients on undernutrition of widowhood controlling for HIV status



Conditional differences in nutritional status Africa-wide

- However, the extent of disadvantage varies: relatively worse outcomes in non-West and (esp.) East Africa.
- Significant negative associations with nutrition, often in areas most affected by HIV/AIDS.
- Yet, the key findings are robust to controlling for HIV.

Senegal: Marital shocks & women's well-being

- Poor women more vulnerable to dissolution & remarriage.
- Remarriage: as **lower-ranked wife** in polygamous HH
- Remarriage does not compensate fully for the economic loss associated with widowhood or divorce.
- It is least effective in ensuring consumption levels for the most vulnerable widows who tend to remarry in levirate marriages.
- **Levirate marriage** comes with lowest consumption levels:
 - Only option for very poor widows & happens in very poor lineages
 - Such marriages act as a poverty trap for those who cannot refuse due to a lack of means or as only way to remain with her children
- Those who can afford to, do not remarry and maintain a level of consumption comparable to married once women.

In summary:

- Frequent shock.
- Severe shock. Ever-widowed/divorced women are often significantly worse off; less able to provide for their children.
- Not universal. Large regional & cross-country differences.
- The lower welfare of women previously widowed or divorced can persist through remarriage.
- Detrimental effects are passed on to children — possibly more so to daughters — suggesting an intergenerational transmission of poverty stemming from marital shocks.
- Evidence of responses to the risk of marital ruptures with consequences for broader societal welfare.

“Combating the neglect of widows and divorcees must be seen as an integral part of the broader struggle against gender inequalities.”

Drèze (1990)

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