Sarah Randall discusses Madhavan et al paper 'Measuring children's living arrangements in rural South Africa: A comparison of approaches and application to schooling outcomes'

1. I really liked this paper. One aspect which I felt was very important – and that maybe some of the other contributors could use as a model – was the very clear outline of key concepts and definitions. In this field there are a number of terms and ideas which are both used technically in demography and also used in everyday life (household, family, relationship etc). This means that, in a cross cultural research context even researchers who are all trained in the same discipline may have different understanding and interpretations of key concepts. This paper was very clear about the different concepts and their understanding of how these fitted into relationships to do with schooling success.

One question: as I understand it the data from this Agincourt INDEPTH site have been collected in ways that allow for different forms of household membership (absent but contributing, sometimes present etc – I think Vicky Hosegood and Ian Timaeus published some interesting work on that a few years ago). Given the fact that these data exist how (if at all) were they incorporated into this analysis? Were the absent household members included in the kin and in the structure of the household or were they excluded? Did including / excluding them make any different to the findings? This is important because if different types of kin / household structures are having an impact on children's schooling achievement – there are a number of different pathways through which this could occur – which could be through presence of key people, competition for resources, supply of resources, or more nebulous influences of key individuals in children's lives (where the absent household members might be key)