Transport and daily mobility in sub-Saharan Africa: exploring young people’s experiences

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in collaboration with
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for further information: www.dur.ac.uk/child.mobility/

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Background

• Preliminary research in Ghana

• ESRC/DFID-funded 3-country study
  [2 agro-ecological zones per country]

• Collaborating Institutions:
  • CSR, University of Malawi
  • University of Cape Coast, Ghana
  • CSIR, South Africa
  • International Forum for Rural Transport & Development

• Focus principally on 9-18 year-olds

• Key themes: access to education, health, activities and livelihoods, transport

• Adult and ‘child’ researcher strands
The ‘child’ researcher strand

- 70 ‘child’ researchers, 11-20 y
- Approx. 4 children per school, 3 schools per zone
- Children’s training workshop in each zone
- Select own methods, research sites, time frame at training workshops
- Conducted at an early stage - findings feed into adult academic research
Child researchers’ selected methods

• Daily mobility diaries

• Photographic journals: the journey to school, journeys around home

• Accompanied walks (interview + map)

• Interviewing about mobility (individual + focus groups)

• Ranking of travel modes and obstacles (by school groups)

• Children as transporters: counting + other observation at key loading points
Child researchers bring their own insights – different from adults

• Clear view of youth perspectives

• Not misled when children say what they think people want to hear

• Pick up issues that children are too embarrassed to raise with adults

• Pick up issues that children think adults will not understand or which seem to be too unimportant
Child researcher’s own booklet
Adult ‘professional’ researcher strand

• 2 agro-ecological zones per country

• 4 sites per zone (24 sites total):
  Urban, Peri-Urban, Rural with services, Remote Rural

• Mixed method approach

• Qualitative studies (children, parents, key informants):
  mobile + other in-depth interviews, FGDs, life histories etc.
  [c. 50-80 per site]

• Questionnaire survey (children 7-18 y):
  N=3,000 [350 variables]
‘Mobile ethnographies’: a key research tool in both strands

‘Social relations, we maintain, are not enacted in situ but are paced out along the ground’ [Ingold and Vergunst 2008]

- Less powerful individuals [e.g. children] often shy in stationary interviews
- Neighbours/parents may hover in stationary interview
- No need for eye contact; silences are natural
- Encourages informal conversation, unsolicited observation
- Valuable mnemonic device re mobility experiences
- Increases researcher understanding of journey problems and experiences
- Constraints:
  - Cross-gender interviews suspect
  - Urban RAs dislike long walks!
Learning from walking:

1. Fear of rape

“I fear people who hide in the bush [waiting] for us. They wait for us in the bush and as we walk, especially when you are alone, they grab your school bag and all the belongings that you have with you…. The bush is bad, you cannot see people hiding or seeking you…. It is even worse to cross the bush at night. There are so many rapists there at night and a lot of drunk people”

(Susan, 17 y, SS pupil, RSA North West region)
“you meet a very long person and I suspect it’s a witch, and there are dogs that chase us and fierce animals – lions and hyenas- and they bit us”

(Elly, 13 y, primary school pupil, Malawi)
3. Workloads; hunger + distance as tipping point for school attendance

‘The journey to school is too far for us so by the time we reach school lessons have already started. … this makes us score very low marks…. Irrespective of the long distance we trek to and from school… we are asked to go to the farm and plant as soon as we arrive home… On other occasions they ask us not to go to school so that we can help on the farm

(Florence, 14 years, forest Ghana)

The distance to school is not a major problem to me but what to eat in order to walk this distance is the problem

(Rebecca, fostered girl, 10y, coastal Ghana)
Some broader project findings

1. Gendered mobility constraints shaped by household needs + issues of female sexuality

- Particular efforts to socialize girls into mobility compliance (in all contexts) from an early age

- Association of (especially female) mobility with suspicious behaviour
  - Mobile girls perceived as vulnerable + potentially promiscuous
    *Those [girls] above 13 yrs of age have [more] restrictions than those below 13 years… because we fear pregnancies … we feel boys are more responsible and less susceptible to bad company…* [mothers’ FGD, RR, Malawi]

- Abduction, rape and supernatural forces as threat [constrains vulnerable/ potentially promiscuous girls to ‘safe’ spaces]
  *There are people who abduct children and then cut their body parts to use it as muti….letting girl children travel alone on public transport is not safe again these days [because of this].* [grandmother carer of 2, RR, RSA]

- Girls’ vulnerability and potential promiscuity often presented as key issues by adult carers BUT *Supervised daily mobility [especially in groups] acceptable for girls when essential for family survival*
2. Children play a key role in filling the transport gap

- Especially girls and fostered children
  “If you see a boy aged more than 15 years headloading ... then you know that he is either a fostered child or a houseboy” (Men’s group, Namende, Malawi)

- Adult discourse: girls trained from an early age so no issue for the majority

- Complex intertwining of perceptions about physical capabilities and gender stereotyping

- Medical view (Ghana): load carrying is ‘normal’ – only a problem if heavy weights carried regularly

- BUT Children report substantial pain and other problems from headloading

- Implications for future health, livelihood and well being? Deformation of the vertebral column etc?
Ghana 2008: Reported physical pain of children 7-18y from load carrying in week prior to survey [N=1000]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>GIRLS % with pain [neck, head etc] N=513</th>
<th>BOYS % with pain [neck, head etc] N=458</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RR</td>
<td>85.0 %</td>
<td>82.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
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<td>PU</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>67.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>60.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>All settlements</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>72.1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3. Surveillance through group [day time] travel requirements

• Parents rarely accompany children to school or on other journeys

• Surveillance [care + control] through group travel requirements widespread in all sites, but more effective in rural areas

• Group travel required especially, but not only, for girls

• Surveillance facilitated by limited access to motorised transport

• Night travel highly restricted, especially for girls

*We encourage that they walk in groups. ... the journey is fearful. I insist that my daughter walks with other children to school everyday.*
[mother of girl 14 yrs, rural Ghana]

*There is a tendency to believe that children, no matter how young they are, as long as they are in the company of other children are safe*
[Chief, Senti, urban Malawi]
4. Widespread view that cycling is unsuitable for girls/potential provocation to men

females, even if they learn they will not get the money to buy a bicycle…even if they ride they just ride it around they do not send it on long distances … they do not have the strength
[out-of-school boy 18 yrs, RS, forest Ghana]

‘a lot of girls feel ashamed to ride bicycles because it makes them expose their legs when cycling. This also makes some men to start admiring them when they come in contact. A lot of men are full of [chilakolako] desire to have sex with these young girls hence they avoid cycling.
[male FGD, RR, Malawi]

it would seem strange to see a girl riding a bicycle in this settlement because it is unheard of
[out-of-school boy 18 y, RS, Eastern Cape, RSA]

• Survey data: knowledge of how to ride a bicycle [n=3000]
  Ghana: 56% girls, 87% boys.
  Malawi: 44% girls 72% boys
  RSA: 52% girls, 71% boys
5. Inter-generational friction and mobility resistances

- Internalized control and surveillance of the traveling group widely accepted
  **BUT**
- Some inter-generational friction evident, especially in urban sites: *Boys can even come home very late at night but not us. .. Parents always doubt our movements. They fear we might get pregnant... [if we are late] parents shout at us, we are not allowed to enter the house, we are whipped by our guardians’* [FGD out of school girls, 16-18 years, Ndirande].

- [Discreet] resistances occasionally reported: travel to banned locations [bars etc.], failure to return home in time. [pregnancy as resistance?]

- Mobility ‘worn with flair’ more evident in urban than rural areas

- More spaces for resistance in urban areas, especially at night
6. Resistance through virtual mobility: the mobile phone as a space of contestation

- Cell phones offer virtual mobility – rapid expansion, especially RSA (substantial advantages especially in stretched households)

I often use [sister’s mobile] to communicate with my mother. It saves me from travelling ….. since I am able to make all requests through her on the phone. It saves money, time and risks of accidents.
[Joseph, school-boy 15 y, living with grandmother, RS Ghana]

- BUT Parental concerns re use of mobiles for illicit activity, and as potential cause of attack etc [especially South Africa]

- Perceptions of mobile ownership among poor schoolgirls/unemployed girls as indicator of sexual liaison [especially sugar daddies]

Children can use them to go behind your back. I think she [granddaughter] has a boyfriend … when we are sitting she would get out when she is receiving this anonymous call. Ever since she had a mobile phone she has been acting weird.
[Grandmother, carer of girl 18 y, RS, RSA]
Young people’s usage of mobile phones in week prior to survey, 2008 [N=2905]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Remote rural</th>
<th>Rural with services</th>
<th>Peri-urban</th>
<th>Urban</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<td>South Africa</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>67.5</td>
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Conclusions

• Few major surprises - findings mostly support prior hypotheses

• But the information from 3 countries (24 sites) may provide the most substantial SSA dataset on children’s mobility and transport use available to date
Some key areas for further research

• Immediate and longer-term health and other impacts of load carrying in childhood

• Impacts of [increasingly rapid] cell phone expansion among children and young people

• Potential interventions e.g. walking buses to provide protection for children on the journey to school in selected locations

• Interconnectedness of children’s and other people’s mobility
  - Children as doorstep anchors
  - Children living with (immobile) elderly carers
Some published papers from the study

Child Mobility Project Team

- www.dur.ac.uk/child.mobility

- Lead Institution: University of Durham, UK

- Collaborating Institutions:
  - University of Cape Coast, Ghana
  - Centre for Social Research, University of Malawi
  - CSIR, Republic of South Africa
  - International Forum for Rural Transport & Development