

Migrant mothers and mobile children

New possibilities for exploring child poverty dynamics in South Africa

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Abstract

This paper focuses on an important dimension of child poverty: children's living environments in post-apartheid South Africa, where the historic spatial configuration of families in relation to work opportunities continues to influence child care arrangements and often leaves children in places that are under-resourced.

Internal migration studies show various patterns of movement for individuals and households, including permanent, temporary and circular migration. These patterns were shaped to a large extent by colonial and apartheid-era policies, in which labour reserves were established in designated rural homelands. Black male labour migrants were channelled into cities and areas of intense industry, while women, children and the elderly remained at the rural home. In recent years migration rates for women have risen, and there are also signs that permanent urban migration may be increasing. Both of these shifts have implications for children and child-care arrangements, in turn suggesting the need for greater consideration of children in infrastructure planning and urban development.

There is an enormous discourse on (adult) migration and temporary labour patterns in South Africa, but very little about how this affects extended families and children. This is partly due to limitations in the construction of national household surveys which are cross-sectional and use a strict definition of household, excluding linked members who are not present. Being a panel survey, the National Income Dynamics Study will in the future enable longitudinal analysis of child mobility patterns and household composition at a national level, and so enhance our understanding of child poverty dynamics by contributing the additional elements of space and time. In the meanwhile, I offer some preliminary findings on children's living environments, co-residence arrangements and mobility using retrospective data.

Introduction

Despite a large body of literature on internal migration in South Africa, there is little focus on what happens to children in the context of adult migration, on children as migrants, and on the consequences of migration for children and their well-being. Urban migration is underpinned by historic and enforced fragmentation of families, and dual housing arrangements allow for circular movement between urban and rural homes. Little attention has been paid to how children specifically might be affected by migration, or the considerations that underlie decisions about where children stay. I intend to address this gap by examining patterns of child mobility and care in the context of absent mothers.

Much population movement has historically taken the form of circular migration, since colonial and apartheid policies effectively prevented permanent urban migration for the black majority. Adult and child populations are differently distributed: in comparison to adults, children are over-represented in rural households. However, the established patterns of internal migration appear to be changing in ways that may have relevance for children. First, there are signs of a shift from circular or oscillating to more permanent urban migration. Second, migration rates amongst adult women of working- (and child-bearing) age have risen in recent years, with changing labour markets, rising male unemployment and a decline in marriage rates. Given these changes, and continued inequality in access to services and social infrastructure in urban and rural areas, it is possible that children will augment the migrant population – through a combination of urban births and child urban migration. The distribution of children may be changing already: in 2002, only 46% of children were resident in urban households (Statistics South Africa, 2003), while 52% were urban in 2008 (own calculations from NIDS Wave 1).

There are obvious policy implications – for housing, urban planning and the development of social infrastructure among others. The spatial development framework (Office of the President, 2006) acknowledges the migration trend towards cities and, in theory, plans for this by prioritizing investment in centres with economic potential – in other words, places of in-migration.

Internal migration & mobility

Mechanisms and patterns of migration

Migration typologies commonly refer to both spatial and temporal mobility elements, with the main categories conceptualised in relation to adult mobility and linked to labour migration (Kok, O'Donovan, Boure, & van Zyl, 2003). Early migration theory developed from the neo-classical tradition, in which migration is seen as a rational choice driven by the desire for economic gain, and where benefits would accrue simultaneously to the migrant (through higher income and skills development), the source household (through remittances) and the destination site (which gains from the migrant's skills and labour). Thus “migration has the potential to contribute towards the development of the receiving sites and of assuaging economic suffering at the places of origin” (Mafukidze, 2006:105). Viewed in this positive way, the arguments of early migration theory found application in the labour policies of the apartheid regime, which limited the number of urban migrants to a productive labour force (so as not to

dilute the ‘benefits’ to towns), and could simultaneously justify under-development of the labour reserves, which were meant to benefit from remittances.

From the 1970’s, dependency theorists expanded migration theory, critiquing the ‘rational choice’ explanation and arguing that the migration was an inevitable response to a western-dominated capitalist system characterised by economic and structural inequality. The theorists held that, rather than conferring benefits all round, migration further marginalises the peripheral areas that supply labour, polarising the sending and receiving nodes in an unequal and exploitative relationship. Importantly, sending areas would tend to forfeit those who were younger, better educated and skilled, more ambitious and enterprising, and this ‘social cost’ was unlikely to be offset simply by remittances (Dasgupta, 1981; Mafukidze, 2006).

More recent migration theory – the ‘new economics of labour approach’ (Stark & Levhari, 1982), holds that household fragmentation through temporary or circular (as opposed to permanent) migration, rather than being an individual decision to the detriment of those left behind, is a means for survival of the broader family or household, driven by a complex of economic and social strategies – to “maximise household income, minimise economic risk and increase exposure to social resources” such as education and health care (Collinson, Tollman, Kahn, Clark, & Garenne, 2006:195). Thus household members “spread themselves over rural and urban places to experience the particular utility each has to offer” (Collinson, Kok, & Garenne, 2006:24). Migration is also a cumulative and self-perpetuating process, facilitated over time by a network of kin, extended kin and migrant networks (Massey, 1990). The dissolution or fragmentation of families therefore has particular consequences for livelihoods in the context of labour migration, where the impact has been to strategically link the rural and urban economies through the movement of people (Collinson, Tollman et al., 2006; May et al., 1998).

Kok et al (2003) summarise a typology of South African migration which encompasses short-term as well as more permanent migration. The model includes the idea of “oscillating migration”, previously described by Spiegel et al (1996) to refer to mobility between urban and rural nodes. While there has historically been a two-way flow between rural and metropolitan areas within South African provinces, the net in-migration at a sub-provincial level is to the smaller towns, which are destinations for those moving from rural areas as well as those returning from large cities (Collinson, Kok et al., 2006). This suggests a need for greater attention to social and service infrastructure development and local government capacity building in small towns as well as in metropolitan areas.

At a national level, of course, the main population growth is in metropolitan areas – both as a result of in-migration and of natural population growth. An analysis of the 1996 Population Census suggests that around three quarters of all internal migration nationally is to metropolitan areas, although this migration is not necessarily one-directional or permanent. (Kok et al., 2003:35). Migration from a rural surveillance site in the north-east of South Africa over the period 1992-2003 found that while movement from village to village was the predominant form of permanent migration, there was no net change as the number of in-migrants was equivalent to the number of out-migrants. On the other hand, a small net out-migration was found when comparing permanent migration to and from a primary urban metropolis (Collinson, Tollman, & Kahn, 2007).

Temporary migration, in which the migrant resides in the place of origin for only a small part of the year, but nevertheless retains strong links with the original home, is an important category in the migration typology. An analysis of panel data from the Agincourt HDSS identified about two thirds of migratory moves as “temporary” (Collinson, Kok et al., 2006). Nearly half (46%) of temporary migration destinations were metropolitan, while 41% were secondary towns (Collinson et al., 2007). Temporary migration is, in turn, enabled by the continued presence of family members in the sending area. Many of these ‘left behind’ members are children.

Temporary and permanent migration

Despite the persistence of oscillating migration across dual household setups, permanent migration may be increasing, with more migrants settling at the place where they have found work. This could be associated with a range of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors, including the lifting of restrictions on permanent urban migration for black South Africans, changing labour policy, the housing subsidy scheme and informal settlement upgrading in cities, and the absence of economic opportunities in rural areas.

There is some debate as to whether there has in fact been a shift towards permanent migration, as was anticipated when apartheid ended. National household surveys between 1993 and 1999 showed a rise in internal migration (in 1999, 36% of rural households reported at least one labour migrant, up from 33% in 1993) but not necessarily an increase in permanent migration. Subsequently, there have been inadequate data to support thorough analysis of migration patterns nationally, due partly to the strict household definition, and probably because expectations that temporary migration would decline – thus migration questions were deprioritised in the surveys (Posel, 2006).

A comparison of migrant-sending households in NIDS (2008) and the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development (1993) shows a decrease in non-resident household members and remittances from household members living elsewhere, suggesting a decline in temporary migration (Leibbrandt & Woolard, 2009) – although the decline in remittances could also be the result of an expanded social grants system which mainly targets children and pensioners (i.e. many of those ‘left behind’), reducing the perceived need for the remote member to remit (Posel & Casale, 2003).

Gilbert and Crankshaw (1999) provide a useful comparison between migration trends in South Africa and Latin America, using their study on migration and household mobility in Soweto to argue that, while South African cities share many characteristics with those in Latin America, there are some important differences in migration patterns across the two regions which may slow what is seen as a natural move towards permanent migration. While the main site of in-migration in Latin American cities was to the inner city, in South Africa it was largely to the periphery, placing migrants far from work opportunities and social resources. Even after the discontinuation of influx control, a lack of alternatives in housing stock and tenure options in South African cities entrenched this spatial arrangement, perpetuating patterns of temporary or circular migration where migrants retain a rural “home” – thus kinship ties and emotional attachment to the home of origin remain strong. This leads to the next point, which is that there may be less incentive for temporary urban migrants to invest in improving their housing situation because the intention to retire to the rural home makes that the more attractive investment prospect. There is some circular reasoning in that inadequate and overcrowded urban living environments may be a deterrent to

permanent migration (for instance, where the migrant cannot provide adequate accommodation for other family members), while at the same time segmented household structures require division of resources (for instance between an urban and a rural home), reducing the income surplus for incremental improvements to urban housing. Thus “the separation of families in South Africa is likely to slow the [housing] consolidation process” (Gilbert & Crankshaw, 1999:2389). While early migrants or “bridgeheaders” (Turner, 1968) in Latin America tended to consolidate and improve their urban housing situation through “self-help”, many urban migrants in the Soweto study failed to do so.

Despite these differences, however, the authors perceive that, even in 1999, there appeared to be a gradual convergence in migration patterns in South Africa and Latin America. Related to this is an association between permanence in the migration pattern and family configuration: the longer migrants have lived in the city “the more likely they are to have a spouse and children living with them” (Gilbert & Crankshaw, 1999:2381). This suggests that the urban share of children would increase as more migrants settle in urban areas.

Increasing female migration

Another reason to suspect that children’s migration patterns might be changing is that more women are migrating to urban centres for work. In 1993, women made up 29% of all migrant workers from rural areas in South Africa. Only relatively recently has there been a narrowing of the (adult) gender differential in migration patterns (Casale & Posel, 2006:12). While urban migration was historically driven by male migrants, a gender analysis from October Household Surveys during the 1990’s showed that a net increase in migration from rural areas during the 1990’s was actually the result of a rise in adult female migration – who by 2000 made up 34% of the urban migrant population (Posel & Casale, 2003:5), and in 2008 comprised 37% of African migrant workers (Posel, 2009).

At a sub-provincial level, women aged 15-25 years appear to be the most mobile group, with the most important categories being 1) young women moving alone (whether or not they are mothers); 2) women moving with children; and 3) women with men and children (Collinson, Kok et al., 2006). Since children are potentially involved in all three of the most mobile categories we can assume that children are also part of the migrant labour movement – whether they move or are “left behind”.

In many cases, children are likely to be in the latter group. The fact that there are family members who can care for children at a (rural) ‘household of origin’, enables working age women, including mothers, to migrate to cities in search of employment (Casale & Posel, 2006:15). In addition, the receipt of the old-age pension in three-generation or skip-generation households is associated with greater numbers of dependant children and higher rates of labour migration amongst prime-age adults, suggesting that women are more likely to migrate when there is an elderly person at the sending home who can care for and financially support children left behind (Ardington, Case, & Hosegood, 2009). An analysis of internal migration to the Gauteng Province, using Census 2001 and Labour Force Survey data, found striking differences in the proportion of children (under the official working age of 15) when comparing the population of Gauteng residents born in the province with those born outside Gauteng. Amongst Gauteng-born residents, 66% of the population consisted of working age adults, and nearly a third (31%) were

children aged 0-14 years¹. However, an age breakdown of in-migrants (Gauteng residents who were born elsewhere) found that 82% of the in-migrant population were working-age adults (15-64 years) while only 14% were children under 15 years (Oosthuizen & Naidoo, 2004:11).

Since the early 1990s there have been changes in household composition in the migrant labour force. While female labour migration increased, there was a simultaneous decline in marital rates, as well as women's co-residence with men. Maintaining their single status may be a strategic decision for women if it enables them to be more independent, to migrate and look for work – “if men restrict the mobility of women, then we would expect that women are more likely to migrate if they are not married and do not live with men – not only because there may be a greater need for women to look for work but also because women have more freedom to move” (Posel & Casale, 2003:7). A regression analysis on female labour migration from rural areas suggests that women's relationships to men are significant in affecting the probability of female migration to places of employment – married women are less likely to move. What is also shown in the regression analysis is that having a young child (aged six or under) reduces the probability of adult female migration, while having a school-age child (7-14 years) increases the probability.

What might changes in migration mean for children?

Household form and fragmentation

The international discourse on rural-urban migration frequently refers to the impacts of migration on family structure, the fragmentation of family, the rise of female-headed and skip-generation households, and so on, alluding to issues of vulnerability in a context where the notion of the 'family' as unit of society is threatened. Thus “policy and academic discussion of family forms has been overshadowed by moral and symbolic fears about 'break down' and 'fragmentation', especially with regard to dynamics of modernisation and urbanisation” (White, 2002:1098).

This concern is echoed in the South African media, in policy statements and in academic discourse about the dissolution or fragmentation of the family, with cross-country migration, internal labour migration and HIV/AIDS being identified as the main contributing elements (see, for example, Ansell & van Blerk, 2005; Bray, 2008; Le Roux, 1999; Murray, 1981). This is not the place to discuss the merits of concepts like household and family – there is a wealth of anthropological literature on the subject. The simple point for now is that the realities of household life do not necessarily fit with Western notions of the (ideal) nuclear family (Amoateng, Heaton, & Kalule-Sabiti, 2007; Sibande, 2001), and that households are frequently extended vertically (over generations) and laterally (in degrees of kinship).

For children, this means greater fluidity in household and care arrangements than would be envisaged in the nuclear family model – as Meintjes (2009) describes:

¹ The standard age bands used by Statistics South Africa do not distinguish “children” as defined in the Constitution. While the constitutional and internationally accepted definition of children is people aged 0-17, the age cut-offs reported in official Stats SA surveys are in five-year bands: 0-4, 5-9, 10-14 and 15-19 etc.

South Africa has a long history of children not living consistently in the same dwelling as their biological parents as a result of poverty, labour migration, educational opportunities, or cultural practice, among other things. It is common for relatives to play a substantial role in child-rearing. Children often experience a sequence of different caregivers, and many children are brought up without paternal figures, or live in different households to their biological siblings.

Colin Murray (1981:104), working in Lesotho, said that “it is the exigencies of the mobility of labour operating within the temporal framework of household development and dissolution that explain observed patterns of family structure in the labour reserve”. While the terms ‘fragmentation’ or ‘dissolution’ are commonly used to describe household dispersion as a negative consequence of migration patterns, the practice of leaving children with family members in households of origin could also be regarded as the opposite – a strategy to retain an ‘unfragmented’ household. It has, for instance, been argued that the dissolution of kin relations predates apartheid migrant labour mobility and even the colonial era, and that the motives for migration might be viewed as a way of seeking “alternative means of being local” (Ngwane, 2003:689).

There is some disagreement about the more recent effects of labour migration on family structure. Despite arguments that modernisation and industrialisation leads inevitably to the simplification of family structure (William Goode 1982, cited in Ziehl, 2001), local surveys suggest that, in rural areas at least, the extended (complex) household form continues to predominate, and that nuclear structures are not increasing (Wittenberg & Collinson, 2007). An analysis of surveillance site data from rural Agincourt found a decline in nuclear family structures (also observed in national household data from Statistics South Africa) and an increase in three-generation linear households. The authors suggest that the increasing prevalence of these households is due largely “to changes in migratory behaviour (such as an increase in female labour migration)” (Wittenberg & Collinson, 2007:136).

Similarly, a comparison of census data from 1996 and 2001 shows no increase in the proportion of “nuclear” family households in the five year period, but a clear increase in “extended” family structures in households where the head of the household is classified as African (Amoateng et al., 2007). Extended households in the form of “skip-generational” or “three-generational” households are more prevalent in rural than urban areas. In 2001, 47% of rural households with an African head were defined as extended in that they spanned three generations, compared with 31% of urban “African households” (Amoateng et al., 2007). In contrast, only around 10% of households headed by whites were extended households spanning three generations, with similar proportions in urban and rural areas.

Child mobility in the context of adult temporary migration

While there is a large discourse on adult migration, there is relatively little known about child migration patterns. This has contributed to an impression that migration – and particularly labour migration – is an adult phenomenon, while children are less mobile. On the contrary, child mobility has been associated with parental (particularly maternal) migration. Children often migrate “as a consequence of many of the same processes that stimulate adult migration, and in response to living arrangements that emerge due to adult migration” (Hosegood & Ford, 2003:1). Localised and qualitative studies have shown that children are highly mobile, with movement across households, towns and provinces being driven by a range of factors, including changing care arrangements due to adult migration, HIV/AIDS illness and death, poverty or the need to position children close to schools, health facilities and other resources. Children do

not necessarily migrate together with, or at the same time as adults, and it cannot be assumed that children’s migration patterns follow that of adults. Rather, children “participate in migration, both independently, as well as with their parents and caregivers as households relocate” (Richter, Norris, Swart, & Ginsburg, 2006:197).

In the rural Hlabisa surveillance site, children with mothers who migrated were 42 times more likely to migrate (Hosegood & Ford, 2003) than those whose mothers did not migrate. This supports the idea that an increase in adult female migration is likely to be accompanied by increased child mobility – though not necessarily that children accompany their migrant mothers. Internal migration of children was evident within the study site: 5% of children migrated from one household to another during a single year. Of those who migrated out of their household, 56% migrated to a household outside the surveillance site (external migration) and so would not be possible to trace, and in most cases (69%) children moved alone or with one or two others, rather than with the entire household, suggesting that, where children are involved, migration tends to occur in a phased manner over time.

An analysis of the Agincourt DHSS found that the presence of an elderly woman at the rural home decreased the odds of children moving by over 25% when the mother was living elsewhere, and the odds were further reduced if there were prime age females in the household. On the other hand, the presence of other women in the household had little effect on child mobility if the child’s mother was co-resident in the household. This confirms the authors’ hypothesis that the presence of maternal substitutes enables independent migration of mothers (Madhavan, Schatz, Clark, & Collinson, forthcoming). Other determinants of child mobility were socio-economic status (where the wealthier the household, the less likely children were to move), gender (boys were less independently mobile than girls) and life stage of the child, where older children were less likely than young children to move (Madhavan et al., forthcoming).

Amongst adult out-migrants from rural Agincourt, mothers were more likely than fathers to take their children with them, and proportionately more migrants were accompanied by their children when the destination was the metropolitan area of Gauteng than any other destination category (Collinson, 2009). But migrant children were a small minority in both 2002 and 2007: in most instances where parents migrated, their children stayed behind. In his dissertation on “Children left behind” Kautzky (2009) provided an analysis of the complexity of care arrangements for the children of adult migrants, by combining all possible co-residence options:

Figure 1 Child moves and care arrangements in Agincourt, 2007

Child care arrangement	Female migrants	Male migrants
All children remain in the sending household	82.7%	87.7%
All children move with the migrant	10.1%	5.8%
All children move somewhere else	1.6%	1.9%
Some children remain in the household and some move with the migrant	4.0%	3.4%
Some children move with the migrant and some move elsewhere	0.2%	0.2%

Some children move elsewhere and some remain in the household	1.4%	0.9%
Some children remain in the household, some move with the migrant and some move elsewhere	0.0%	0.1%
TOTAL	100%	100%

Source: Kautzky 2009 (Calculations from Agincourt DHSS)

From this we can see that children were more likely to accompany a migrant mother than a migrant father, and that in total, 14% of migrant mothers took at least one of their children with them when they migrated. A child-centred analysis of the same data did not suggest different mobility patterns for children of different gender or age groups, except that, understandably, infants under one year constituted only 2.8% of all children left behind (Kautzky, 2009).

Barriers to child migration

When children do appear in the general migration typologies, it is often as residual or absent dependant family members – in other words, children tend to be considered from the (absent) migrant’s perspective. For instance, an analysis of migrants in Soweto found that over half of urban migrants had “some of their dependent children living at [their rural] ‘home’” (Gilbert & Crankshaw, 1999:2380). The obvious corollary is that many rural children have an absent parent living in the city. There are numerous reasons why migrating parents may be reluctant to take their children with them. Some of these were initially articulated to me in a conversation with a grandmother caring for five grandchildren whose mother was a migrant.

I met Mrs X at her home in Krakrayo, a small rural village in the Amathole district of the Eastern Cape. She was caring for five grandchildren, all under the age of 14, while her daughter (the children’s mother) was living in Cape Town. The understanding between the grandmother and her daughter was that once the daughter had found work and a suitable place for the family to live, the children would move to Cape Town and stay with her. In the meantime, the migrant daughter was sharing a shack belonging to acquaintances of the family from the same village.

The grandmother spoke about why it was both infeasible and inappropriate for the children to join their mother in this “temporary” accommodation: it would be too much of an imposition on the host family, who were not relatives; there was not enough space for children in the small dwelling they occupied; the mother did not want her children to live in the informal settlement, which was dangerous; things were too uncertain – their mother needed to find a job and have some kind of secure tenure before undertaking the risk and expense of bringing the children to join her.

It was because the care arrangement was considered temporary that the mother had applied for and was claiming the children’s child support grants in Cape Town (which is technically unlawful), using some of the money to support herself while she looked for work and sending the rest to her mother in the Eastern Cape to spend on the children’s needs.

Mrs X’s explanation suggested a series of strategic decisions which linked care arrangement decisions for the ‘left-behind’ children with her adult daughter’s rather precarious housing and employment situation

on the one hand, and with the availability of free care and accommodation for the children, via the grandmother. Thus a combination of deterrents (which discourage simultaneous child migration) and enablers (which encourage continued residence at the place of origin) resulted in a decision to separate the children from their mother.

Existing research suggests that urbanisation is enabled by the existence of migrant networks, where knowing a person at the destination is a mechanism for enabling in-migration. Illegal occupation of peri-urban land is related to a shortage of affordable housing within the confines of the city, and the growth of these settlements is enabled by “social catalysts” which have to do with “specific relationships of ownership and control over vacant land” (Beall, Crankshaw, & Parnell, 2002:132). Connections of people over space mean that migration gains momentum through a process of “cumulative causation” (Collinson, Kok et al., 2006; Kok et al., 2003; Massey, 1990; Stark & Levhari, 1982). Thus “the propensity to migrate grows over time through expansion and intensification of the migrant network” (Zelinski 1971, cited in Collinson, Kok et al., 2006). This network is described as essential for securing accommodation and accessing land. However, the dependence on social networks for temporary lodging may discourage the simultaneous migration of children, particularly if the ‘host’ household is already over-crowded.

Informal settlements are important transitional spaces in the context of urban migration, in that informal housing can be used as an initial point of access to the city for people who cannot obtain their own land through formal processes (Gilbert & Crankshaw, 1999; Lemanski, 2009; Marx, 2007). The main forms of informality in urban areas are shack settlements on demarcated or undemarcated land, and backyard shacks on existing properties. An advantage of backyard housing over informal settlements is that it is often better located, enabling easier access to services and resources. Informality, particularly in backyards, is commonly associated with single adult migrants or young people in transition after leaving their parental home – yet children are also present. In 2008, 2 million people were living in informal backyard accommodation or ‘backyard shacks’. Over a third (35%) of this population was made up of children (own calculations from Statistics South Africa, 2009). There are known risks associated with informal settlements – particularly for young children, who are particularly vulnerable to a range of threats associated with crowded conditions, poor or absent water, sanitation and refuse removal services, the use of paraffin stoves and associated risk of fire or poisoning, perpetual problems with drainage and flooding, long distances to reach health facilities and schools, and so on. However, an analysis of household structure in three informal settlements surveyed in an Urban LandMark study showed that, although there were more single-adult households in informal settlements than in other housing types, nuclear families and single parent households predominated (Marx, 2007).

In the case described above, the grandmother’s reasons for family separation are not unfamiliar. Social networks and informality, for example, are well acknowledged as mechanisms of urban migration. What remains to be explored is the extent to which these ‘mechanisms’ of migration constitute barriers to simultaneous child migration. In addition, more child-focused analysis of urban migration is needed to understand the extent to which this takes place in a step-wise manner, with generations migrating at different times (or, in the scenario above, would the children ever join their mother as intended, and if not, why not?) My purpose here is not to promote the nuclear family form or even suggest that children *should* live with their mothers rather than other relatives. Rather, I am interested in the contexts that enable or

prevent people – especially mothers and children – to make deliberate and strategic choices about their own lives and household configuration.

Migration, living environments and child poverty

Spatial arrangements and children’s living environments

Child poverty in South Africa is multi-dimensional, widespread and deep – although its severity and dimensions tend to be masked by aggregate reporting on population statistics. A legacy of apartheid, child poverty is deepened by spatial inequality, unemployment, education deficits and HIV/AIDS, all of which are trans-generational. Uneven access to employment opportunities, services and resources is partly the result of spatial arrangements. The ex-homelands remain the poorest and most under-resourced parts of the country, and are home to around half of South Africa’s children as well as large proportions of the elderly, the unemployed and the income-poor.

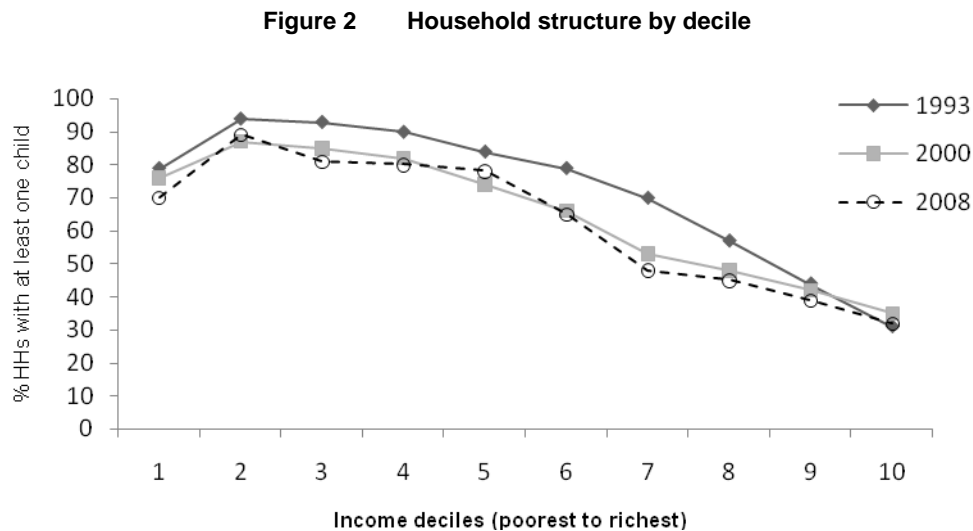
Despite delivery of around 2.5 million subsidised houses since 1994, there is no evidence to suggest that the proportion of children living in informal dwellings is decreasing. Around 13% of the child population (2.3 million children) reside in informal housing, with a further 17% in traditional dwellings. Importantly, the proportion of children living in overcrowded conditions (measured as more than two household members per room, including living room and kitchen) has increased significantly – from 24% of all children in 2002 to 30% in 2008 (own analysis of General Household Survey) – with the change being most pronounced in the Western Cape, Gauteng and the North West, provinces with large metropolitan areas and/or industry-intense centres.

If we understand poverty to be multidimensional in nature (see Noble, Wright, & Cluver, 2007), then location is key to many dimensions of poverty, and influences the extent to which a range of other needs and rights can be met (Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, 2006; Child-Friendly Cities, 1996; Innocenti Research Centre, 2002). Migration theories have tended to explain the driving force behind rural-to-urban migration as being about movement towards jobs, but in the context of high unemployment in both rural and urban settings, employment seeking may be an inadequate explanation for migration. Catherine Cross suggests that “infrastructure and public goods delivery is now a major factor in rural migration decisions... [where] public goods that provide basic needs such as water and energy have become a second-best substitute goal” (Cross, 2001:114). At present, children are significantly more likely than adults to live on properties without a connection for drinking water (37% v. 27%) and without adequate sanitation facilities (41% v. 31%) (Statistics South Africa, 2008, own analysis).

Income poverty

Children across the world – particularly in developing countries – carry a disproportionate burden of poverty (UNICEF, 2006). Just over half of the population (54%) lives in income poverty (Leibbrandt, Woolard, Finn, & Argent, 2010 p.35) when using the Hooegeven and Özler lower bound threshold of R515 per person per month (Hooegeven & Özler, 2006). Comparing adults and children, and using the same poverty line, 67% of children are defined as poor, compared with only 46% of adults (Hall & Wright, forthcoming). The proportion of households with children is considerably lower in the upper (richer) income deciles than in the lower

deciles (Figure 2). This may be construed as “an obvious effect of reproductive choices on economic status” (Leibbrandt et al., 2010:28) although the dip in the prevalence of children in the poorest decile may signify the opposite – the effect of economic status on reproductive choice.



Source: Leibbrandt, Woolard, Finn, & Argent, 2010 (calculations from SALDRU 1993, IES 2000 and NIDS 2008)

Both income poverty and inequality have increased in urban areas, the Gini coefficient within urban areas having risen from 0.61 to 0.67 between 1993 and 2008 (Leibbrandt et al., 2010). While inequality is linked to rising unemployment and earnings inequality, increased urban poverty may also be the result of in-migration.

The dependence of rural households on remittances places them in an economically precarious position. An analysis of income mobility by Woolard and Klasen, using the KwaZulu-Natal Income Dynamics Study (KIDS), found that, while demographic events such as the loss (or gain) of household members was the biggest single contributor to change in household income, a fall in remittances accounted for 11% of instances where households moved below an exogenous poverty line (Woolard & Klasen, 2004). The KIDS survey showed that rural households were larger than urban households on average, and also contained a larger share of children. An increase in the share of children in rural households was a significant determinant of (negative) change in household income over a five year period from 1993 to 1998 (Woolard & Klasen, 2004:24-25). Post 1998, this effect is likely to be offset by the widespread roll-out of the child support grant, which operates on the principle that the grant should follow the child – in the same way that a large share of elderly household members (pensioners) is associated with increases in income (Woolard & Klasen, 2004:25).

However, the social welfare system is not designed to support households where there is unemployment. In the absence of social assistance for the unemployed, and the small value of social grants (particularly

those targeted to children – the Child Support Grant is worth R250 per month in 2010), urban planners “can no longer rely on the rural sector to absorb urban unemployment, as rural communities can no longer count on wage work in the urban areas to support families unable to live off the land economy” (Cross, 2001:114).

Poor outcomes for child migrants

The “Birth to Twenty” (BT20) study in greater Johannesburg area is notable in that it provides an account of child-centred outcomes in the context of child urban migration. BT20 is a panel survey which has followed a cohort of children from their birth in 1990 for 20 years to 2010. As part of this study, caregivers of nearly 5 400 children participated in a cross-sectional “Children’s School Survey” which was undertaken in 2002, and which enabled comparison between the BT20 cohort and more recent migrant children of the same age. Richter et al (2006) use data from the cross-sectional survey to explore whether urban migration is associated with differences in children’s living conditions. Against a backdrop of widespread assumptions that children in urban areas are better off than rural children, the analysis finds enormous disparity in the living conditions of urban child residents. Importantly, migrant children “were significantly less likely to live in a house (55%) than long-standing resident children (74%), and more likely to live in a shack, garage, flat or cottage” (Richter et al., 2006:204). Long-term child residents were significantly more likely to live in accommodation that was owned by family members, and had better access to basic services. Despite the fact that adult work-seeking is one of the drivers of migration, in-migrant parents (particularly mothers) were less likely than long-term residents to be employed (see also Crankshaw & Parnell, 2002).

The pattern continues for various other indicators of child well-being: migrant children were more likely to start school late and lived in households that had fewer assets and appliances. These disparities are all the more striking in light of the finding that nearly half of all surveyed children were born elsewhere and had migrated to the metropolis within their first 12 years. The authors conclude that “whilst migration to urban areas is often prompted by the search for improved living conditions...it may not translate into the same benefits that long-term resident families enjoy. In-migrant children consequently appear to be more vulnerable to poverty, as well as health, social and educational risks, and may experience more difficulty in navigating the hazards of urban life... The results of the study therefore suggest that the wellbeing of migrant families and children is of particular concern in policy formulation related to the provision of infrastructure and social services” (Richter et al., 2006:211-212).

Data limitations and new opportunities

As already discussed, there is a shortage of empirical research on urban migration from a children’s perspective, in particular to understand the mechanisms that drive migration, to explore patterns of phased migration where generations migrate at different times, and to understand the consequences of adult and/or child migration on children’s quality of life (Kok et al., 2003; Richter et al., 2006).

The dearth of research is partly due to the limitations of available household surveys, including the constraints of working with adult-only samples, with cross-sectional or region-specific data, with narrowly defined ‘households’ and poorly-defined intra-household relationships. In a sense, the National

Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) offers solutions to all of these common limitations. Briefly, NIDS is a nationally representative longitudinal panel survey commissioned by the Presidency and is conducted by the Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) at the University of Cape Town. The first wave was conducted in 2008 and the second wave is in field in 2010. It is anticipated that the panel study will continue in waves two years apart, with no planned cut-off date at present.

Incorporation of children

From 2007 Statistics South Africa eliminated children under 15 from the household roster of the bi-annual labour force survey, making it impossible to conduct child-centred analyses on the best source of regularly generated employment and income data. NIDS addresses this gap in that it is also a nationally representative survey which records detailed information about labour participation, earnings and expenditure (more detailed than the LFS in the latter categories), and also includes details of every child living in the sampled household. This makes it possible to use a child-focused perspective in analysing adult-centred issues such as employment, income and labour migration. (A slight drawback is that the NIDS child dataset only includes children under 15 years, while those aged 15 and over are included in the adult data set. Some of the variables in the child dataset are not available in the adult dataset – for instance detailed information on social grants for children, information about absent parents and some of the child-specific education and health variables.)

Definition of the household

Most of the national data that would support child-centred analysis (including the census and other household surveys conducted by Statistics South Africa) use a *de facto* definition of the household, which only counts as household members those who physically reside in the household at the time of the survey, and excludes linked members who are not regularly present at the time of the survey. The specific definition of a household, as used by Statistics South Africa, is those who have “stayed here (in this household) for at least four nights on average per week during the last four weeks”. This yields a snapshot of a household at a particular point in time. The General Household Survey, for instance, is conducted in July each year, and does not count temporary migrants as household members. The ‘households’ recorded in the survey would look rather different if the fieldwork were conducted in December, when many migrants return to their main ‘home’.

A *de jure* definition of the household, by contrast, includes household members who spend some (or even most) of their time somewhere else but have not permanently migrated. This definition, used in the Agincourt Health and Socio-Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS) and other longitudinal studies, has also been adopted by NIDS. The broader ‘household’ in NIDS includes “all individuals that have lived under this ‘roof’ or within the same compound/homestead at least 15 days during the last 12 months OR who arrived in last 15 days and this was now their usual residence” AND who share food and resources from a common resource pool. Thus a household is defined not by regularity of a member’s physical presence, but by their subjective ‘belonging’ to the household implied by shared resources and communal living.

The fact that it is possible to identify both the narrowly-defined (current) household and the broader (*de jure*) household means that it is possible to disaggregate households with migrant members, to discern the

relationships between resident children and absent migrants, and to explore the situation of children in households with temporary migrants.

Longitudinal design

Repeated cross sectional surveys can be compared over time (for instance, to monitor trends in poverty levels or living conditions), but there are limitations to drawing conclusions about the dynamics of individual or household change. The advantage of a panel survey, such as NIDS, is that rather than presenting a static picture it is possible to link individuals across rounds so that children's progress can be followed as they grow older and move into adulthood. Importantly, NIDS is effectively an expanding panel in that individuals recorded in the first wave are followed even if they move to different households, and once found, data is collected for all 'new' household members even if they are not part of the panel.

The first wave of NIDS is nationally representative and the panel consists of 28 255 individuals in 7 305 households, of whom 11 407 are children under 18 years (data for 9 616 children are contained in a separate 'child' data set for members under 15 years). This sample will be followed in subsequent waves, every two years, even if this requires finding individuals who have moved to different districts or provinces. In addition, the Wave 1 household roster includes 2 915 non-resident household members who are not assigned pid numbers (and therefore do not form part of the panel), but for whom some basic data is obtained, including their age and sex, relationship to the resident head, marital status and identification of spouse and parents living in the household. Resident children can be linked to non-resident parents via the person code in the household roster. Data is also obtained on the reason for absence of non-resident members (which enables labour migrants to be distinguished), and the province and type of accommodation where they live.

National focus

A panel design means that one can start to explore the effects of temporary migration on children who migrate with their parents or are 'left behind'. There is virtually no South African research that does this; the few existing analyses are drawn from localized studies in surveillance sites such as Agincourt (Kautzky, 2009), Johannesburg (Richter et al., 2006) and Umkhanyakude (Hosegood & Ford, 2003). In the latter case, the focus is on child care and mobility in the context of HIV/AIDS and related orphaning, rather than parental migration.

Longitudinal studies in the surveillance sites, while helpful in following individuals and households over time, are limited by their geographic specificity. Rural surveillance sites such as Agincourt and Hlabisa may be typical of a 'sending' community, but the data are limited to the panel that remains within the site and therefore cannot reflect the situation in places of in-migration. NIDS not only provides a national panel, but is able to follow households and individuals across regions. It therefore offers a unique opportunity to examine migration patterns and effects nationally – in both the sending and receiving areas.

Relationships of care

Finally, while national household surveys that include children in the household roster enable the identification biological parents for each child if the parent lives in the same household, most do not

enquire about care arrangements for children or nominate ‘caregivers’. Where parents are dead or living elsewhere, the child’s relationship to the ‘household head’ (itself a flawed term) is a poor proxy for care relationships – for instance, in order to infer a relationship between children and other adult household members. NIDS, on the other hand, includes quite a detailed section on child care arrangements, even when parents are present in the household. As well as recording the person code for the household member who provides information about the child, person and relationship codes are recorded in respect of each child for the household member who is mainly responsible for the care of each child, and relationship codes for additional members who help care for the child. It is possible to identify the member who receives a social grant on behalf of the child (this person should, in terms of social assistance regulations, be the *de facto* ‘primary caregiver’) and the member who pays for medical aid if the child has medical insurance. Thus the design caters for the fact that there may be an array of types of ‘care’, and that responsibilities may be shared between multiple household members. Importantly, it is possible to determine the role of fathers, grandmothers, aunts, siblings, non-relatives and so on where mothers are absent.

The remaining section of this paper presents some analysis of the NIDS data on children and parental co-residence, child and maternal mobility, and care arrangements for children in the absence of mothers.

Parental absence, care arrangements, mobility and child outcomes

Children as unit of analysis: parental co-residence

Children are constitutionally defined as individuals under 18 years. There were 18.7 million children living in South Africa in 2008, according to Statistics South Africa’s mid-year estimates (Statistics South Africa, 2009). The weighted NIDS data produces a slightly lower estimate of children for the same year, at 18.4 million. Of all children in South Africa, only a third live with both their parents, while a quarter live with neither parent (Table 1). Mothers are co-resident with 73% of children, while a smaller proportion of children (36%) have a co-resident father. The distributions vary for different population groups. Amongst white children, 69% live with both parents, and only 5% live with neither parent. Compared to all other race groups, black children are more likely to live with neither parent (28%), and less likely to live with both parents (28%).

Table 1 Parental co-residence by race group

	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>All children</i>
Both parents co-resident	28%	52%	75%	69%	33%
Father absent, mother co-resident	42%	32%	10%	23%	40%
Mother absent, father co-resident	3%	1%	7%	3%	3%
Both parents absent	28%	16%	8%	5%	25%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Own calculations from NIDS Wave 1 (weighted data)

Parental absence is related to a number of factors including death, illness, divorce and labour migration. Child orphaning rates have risen significantly between 2002 and 2008, largely as a result of HIV/AIDS (Meintjes, 2010). Of the 4.7 million children with absent mothers, 29% are maternal or double orphans while 71% have living non-resident mothers. Many more children (11.3 million) have absent fathers, of whom 73% are known to be living but stay elsewhere. Table 2 shows the orphan status for children whose mothers or fathers are absent (note that there is some duplication, as some children with absent mothers also have absent fathers and vice versa – this is obviously the case with the 755,000 double orphans, for instance).

Table 2 Orphan status of children with absent parents²

	MOTHER ABSENT			FATHER ABSENT		
	Prop.	95% CI	# children	Prop.	95% CI	# children
Both parents alive	54.6%	(51.7 -57.5)	2,606,000	69.0%	(67.2 -70.8)	7,796,000
Mother dead, father alive	12.6%	(10.6 -14.5)	600,000	3.9%	(3.3 -4.5)	441,000
Father dead, mother alive	17.0%	(14.8 -19.3)	813,000	20.4%	(18.7 -22.0)	2,304,000
Both parents dead	15.8%	(13.8 -17.8)	755,000	6.7%	(5.8 -7.6)	755,000
Total	100.0%		4,774,000	100.0%		11,297,000

Own calculations from NIDS Wave 1 (weighted data)

Prop. – proportion; CI - Confidence interval; # - illustrative number rounded to nearest thousand

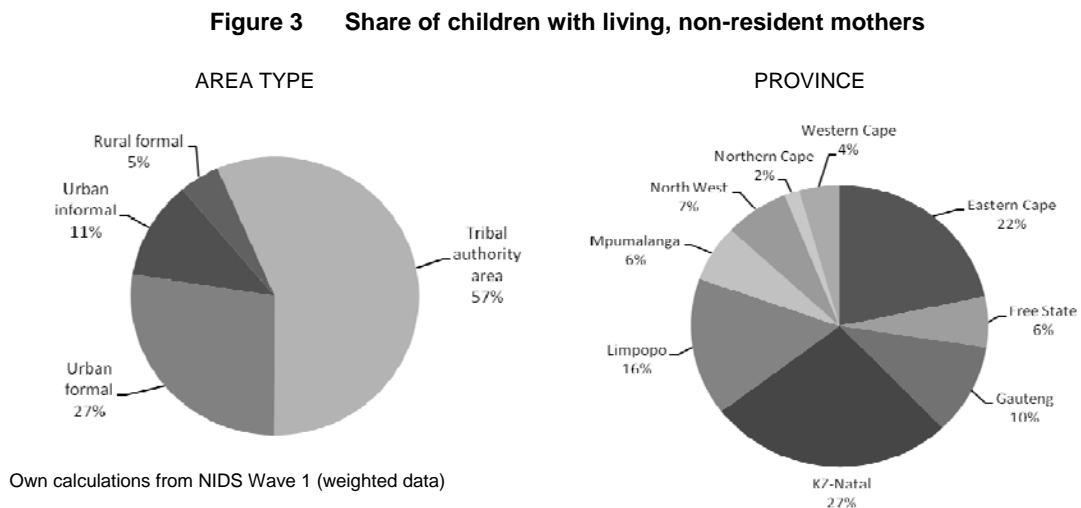
Existing research has shown a negative association between motherhood and labour force participation amongst women. However, the effect is exaggerated by the fact that estimates are usually derived from samples of co-resident mothers. An alternative analysis confirms that the negative effect of motherhood on labour participation is reduced if the non-resident mothers are included, and that mothers who are not co-resident with their children are significantly more likely to be labour force participants (Posel & van der Stoep, 2008). In the remainder of the analysis, I focus on maternal co-residency patterns where mothers are alive. The important issue of children’s mobility and care in the context of orphaning has been quite extensively discussed (see, for example, the work of Ansell & van Blerk, Bray and Brandt, Hosehood & Ford, Madhavan et al). I am interested in a different issue, which relates to co-residence, mobility and care in a context where mothers migrate – a question that has been rather neglected even though, as shown above, orphaning is not the main reason for the separation of children and mothers.

Children are unevenly distributed across the country, and the distribution of the child population is different to that of adults. In comparison to adults, children are over-represented in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo, and under-represented in Gauteng and the Western Cape. The provinces

² The definition of ‘orphan’ used here includes children whose mother / father is known to be deceased, as well as those for whom the vital status of their mother / father is unknown. The number of ‘unknown’ cases is very small in NIDS: the mother’s vital status was unknown for 18 out of 11 005 children (0.16% unweighted), and slightly higher for fathers: 196, or 1.78% of children.

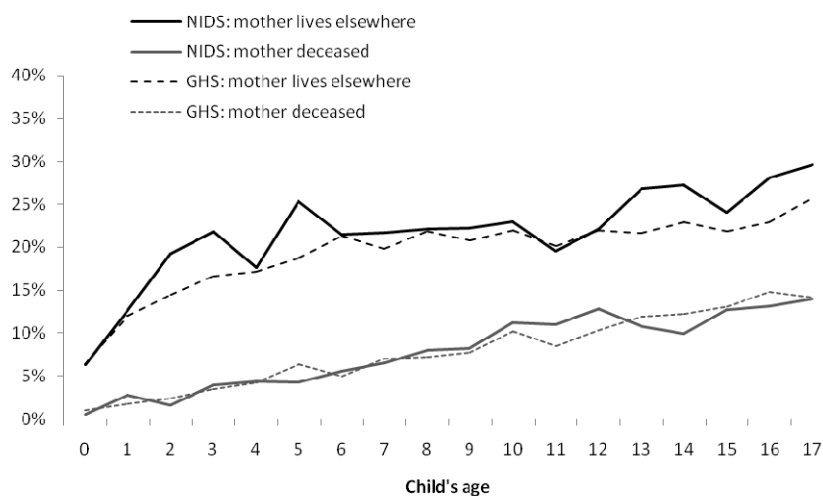
with disproportionately large child populations are also the main ‘sending’ provinces for adult migrants, and those with disproportionately small child populations have the largest metropolitan centres and are the main destinations for cross-province migration. It is to these areas that permanent migration might be expected, although the possibility of ‘counter-urbanisation’ is also possible due to decreasing living standards in urban slums (Collinson et al., 2007). Children are over-represented in rural areas under ‘tribal authority’ (42% of children), when compared with adults (29%), and under-represented in urban formal areas (41%, compared with 53% of adults). There is no significant difference in the share of children and adults living in ‘rural formal’ areas (such as commercial farms) or urban informal settlements.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of children whose living mothers are not co-resident in the narrowly-defined household – by area type and province. As would be expected, the majority of children without a co-resident mother are found in rural ‘tribal’ areas, and the Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Limpopo provinces, which together are home to 53% of all children in South Africa, are also home to two thirds (65%) of children whose mothers live elsewhere.



The older children get, the greater the proportion with absent mothers. Figure 4 shows the proportion of children who live in households where their mothers are absent due to death or separate living arrangements. Trends for NIDS and GHS are shown together – the latter providing a slightly smoother line because of its larger sample.

Figure 4 Maternal non-residence and orphaning by age of child



Source: NIDS Wave 1 & GHS 2008

Care arrangements in the absence of parents

The overwhelming majority of children living apart from their biological mothers are cared for by grandparents. Children whose fathers are absent are much more likely to be living with their mothers than the other way round. This is partly because many fathers are not co-resident with children who have absent mothers, while many mothers live with children who have absent fathers.

Table 3 Child care arrangements in absence of parents

“Who is the main person responsible for making sure that this child is fed, bathed, goes to school, helped with homework, taken care of when child is ill, etc?”

	MOTHER ABSENT	FATHER ABSENT	BOTH ABSENT
Grandparent	54%	26%	57%
Biological / adoptive / foster parent	17%	61%	13%
Aunt / uncle	14%	6%	15%
Sibling / in-law / other relative	13%	6%	13%
Other relative / in-law	7%	4%	7%
Other non-related	1%	0%	1%

Own calculations from NIDS Wave 1 (weighted data)

The figures support what we know already: that in the absence of parents, extended family members are responsible for the care of children, and it is likely that the presence of alternative caregivers at home enables women to migrate for work or to seek employment. Few children have caregivers who are not related.

Absent adults

NIDS follows the approach used in the 1993 Project for Statistics on Living Standard (PSLSD) in that it is possible to identify non-resident household members. I use a method similar to that used by Dorrit Posel (2009) to identify absent adult members. Starting with the household roster (a total of 31 170 records including both resident and non-resident household members), I created an ‘adult’ variable in which adults as defined as all those aged 18 or above. Those whose age is missing or unknown were classified as adults if their marital status was married, widowed or divorced, or if their highest educational qualification was Grade 11 or higher. Adults were defined as absent if they are recorded as ‘not present in the household’ in the household roster. After merging with the adult file, additional adults were classified as absent if they had been recorded as resident household members but sleep in the household less than four nights per week. I then generated a household-level variable to identify all households where there was at least one absent adult member. The individual and household level results are shown in Tables 4 and 5 below:

Table 4 Absent men and women

<i>Individual level</i>	UNWEIGHTED		WEIGHTED	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Total absent adults	2,597	100.0%	621,057	100.0%
Absent men	1,492	57.5%	339,626	54.7%
Absent women	1,105	42.5%	281,431	45.3%
Total adult population	18,891		29,986,520	

Own calculations from NIDS Wave 1

The above table shows that women make up 45% of the ‘absent’ adult population – i.e. all those who are not resident in their households at least four nights per week. At a household level, 18% of households (when weighted) have a least one absent adult member. This increases to 20% when calculated as a proportion of ‘African’ households³. About one third of ‘African’ households from rural areas under tribal authority have at least one absent adult member.

Table 5 Households with absent adult members

<i>Households with absent member(s)</i>	UNWEIGHTED			WEIGHTED			(95% CI)	
	<i>(Total HHs)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>(Total HHs)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>lower</i>	<i>upper</i>
All households	(7,305)	1575	21.6%	(13,726,530)	2,487,835	18.1%	16.9%	19.4%
African households	(5,619)	1366	24.3%	(10,471,241)	2,098,719	20.0%	18.7%	21.4%
African households in rural 'tribal' areas	(2,612)	895	34.3%	(3,604,288)	1,140,296	31.6%	29.4%	33.9%

Own calculations from NIDS Wave 1

³ For this purpose, following Posel, I have defined a household as “African” if there is at least one resident adult African member.

If we apply a child lens to these results, it is apparent that large numbers of children live in households where there are absent adults. Around a quarter of all children live in households with at least one absent adult. The proportion is higher among African children (29%) and when calculated as a proportion of all African children living in rural areas under tribal authority, 39% are in households with absent adults.

Table 6 Children living in households with absent adult members

<i>Children in households with absent adult member(s)</i>	UNWEIGHTED			WEIGHTED			(95% CI)	
	<i>(Total children)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>(Total children)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>lower</i>	<i>upper</i>
All children	(11,005)	3,327	30.2%	(17,582,656)	4,627,943	26.3%	24.3%	28.2%
African children	(9,157)	3,109	34.0%	(15,021,041)	4,387,838	29.2%	27.0%	31.4%
African children in rural 'tribal' areas	(5,636)	2,329	41.3%	(7,604,049)	2,924,441	38.5%	35.4%	41.6%

Own calculations from NIDS Wave 1

In her analysis of the migration data in NIDS, Posel (2009) presents the reasons for adult absence, comparing frequencies for reasons provided in NIDS and in the PSLSD 15 years earlier. Employment (work or work-seeking), has declined as the main reason for absence (given as the main reason for absence for 77% of all absent adult members in 1993, and for 59% in 2008), indicating a decline in labour migration. This coincides with an increase in the proportion of absent adults who are described simply as “living elsewhere” (from 2% of absent adults in 1993 to 17% in 2008) – which may indicate a shift towards permanence. An additional 13% are absent for educational reasons (up from 10% in 1993).

A fifth of all children (3.5 million) have living mothers who are absent from their household. Of these, only 33% are living in households where at least one adult member is reported to be absent (95% CI: 29.4–36.7%). For the remaining 67% of children whose living mothers are not co-resident, no absent adult members are reported. This suggests that, for two thirds of children whose mothers live somewhere else (2.3 million children when weighted), their mother is not regarded as part of the child’s household, even when using the broad household definition. This may be partly due to permanent migration away from the home where the child lives, and partly a result of children being sent away from the mother’s permanent home to another household. As we have seen, the majority of children living separately from their mother are cared for by grandparents.

I now briefly examine co-residence and separate living arrangements for mothers and children, from the perspective of mothers.

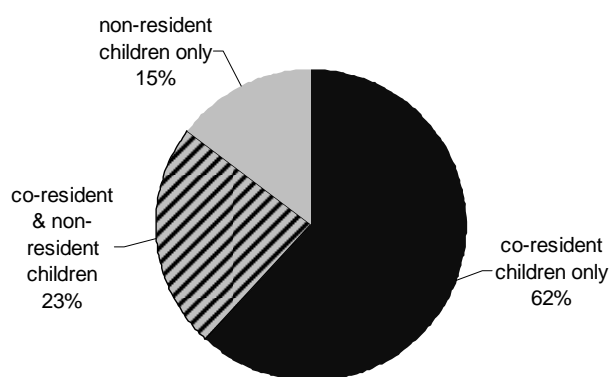
Non-resident children: mother-centred analysis

A large proportion of mothers with biological children under 18 are not co-resident with their children. In order to define non-resident children from a mother’s perspective, I have used the following variables in the household roster: C1.2 (ever given birth), C1.3 (resident biological children) and C1.5 (non-resident biological children). Because of the focus on maternal co-residence in the context of adult migration I limited mothers to women aged 18 and over (i.e. excluding mothers who are teenage children), and capped the age at 49 in order to ensure that most of the reported ‘children’ would be under 18 years. Of all women aged 18 to 49, 78% reported having given birth. Of these, 84% reported having co-resident

children, and 37% had non-resident children. Almost a quarter (23%) had both co-resident and non-resident children, as shown in Figure 5 below:

Figure 5 Co-residence of children with their mothers

(Mothers as unit of analysis: based on women aged 18 to 49 who have ever given birth)



Own calculations from NIDS Wave 1

For each woman who had given birth, the interviewer recorded the number of children who were living in the same household, and the number of children who were living elsewhere. Using the same sub-population of mothers aged 18 to 49 years, 7 million mothers (weighted) reported a total of 13.8 million biological children to be co-resident, while 3.1 million mothers reported 5.1 million biological children non-resident.

It is not possible to determine from a single wave of the panel whether non-resident children were sent away from the household, or whether they were ‘left behind’ when their mothers moved from a different household. However, there is a clear association between the mobility of mothers and their co-residence with biological children. Of the subpopulation of mothers aged 18 to 49, half (51%) were defined as ‘mobile’ in that they had moved to the household as adults⁴. Greater proportions of mothers with non-resident children had moved to the household as adults.

<i>Co-residence category</i>	<i>Proportion of mothers who moved to the household as adults</i>
All biological children are co-resident	44% (95% CI: 41.5-47.4%)
Children are a mix of co-resident and non-resident	58% (95% CI: 53.1-62.2%)
All biological children are non-resident	71% (95% CI: 65.3-75.8%)

Own calculations from NIDS Wave 1

⁴ Adult mobility was calculated by subtracting the reported year of move to current location from 2008, and then subtracting the difference (i.e. the number of intervening years since the move) from the age of the respondent. A result of 18 or more meant that the respondent was an adult at the time of the move. Those who ‘never moved’ were automatically classified as non-mobile, and those with missing or ‘don’t know’ responses were assigned to missing.

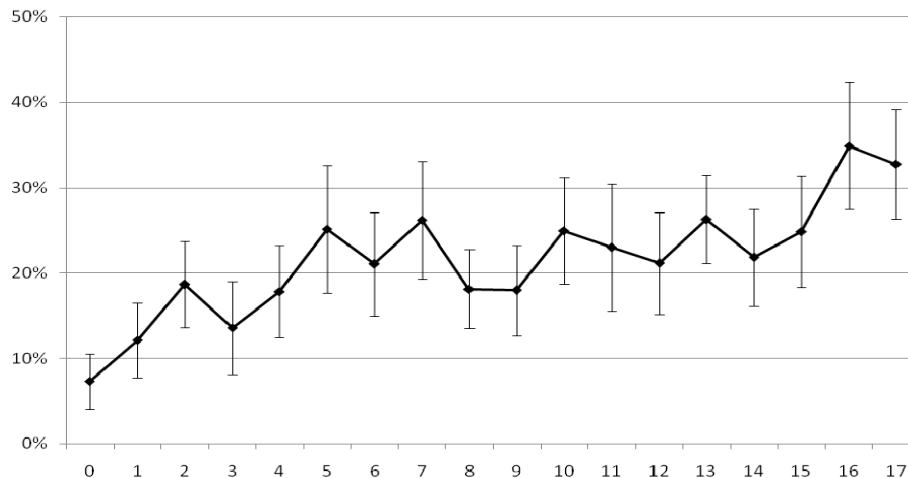
Child mobility

NIDS captures information on the movement of children – a feature of childhood which is highly relevant for social policy and the targeting of poverty alleviation programmes. The survey records information on where household members were born, where they were living in 1994 (adults only) and 2006, as well as in the current year (2008 for the first wave). With repeated panel rounds over time, NIDS will enable an analysis of children’s movements in relation to those of their parents and other household members, and with possibilities for tracing the movement of household members to the level of suburb through the use of geocodes. I have not attempted to do this here, and the analysis is obviously limited to retrospective questions.

In order to investigate child mobility, I have used the variable that specifies the year of move to the current place of residence. The initial data work entails generating a new variable “mobile” to define individuals who have ever moved⁵. (Note that the questions are about change of place, so mobility refers specifically to geographical movement, rather than change of house or suburb within a place or town.)

A fifth of all children (21%) are defined as mobile in that they have moved to a different place since they were born. The proportion of children who are mobile increases with age. While 14% of children aged 0-4 have ever moved (95% CI: 11.6–16.0%), this increases to around 22% for children between 5 and 14, and 31% for teenagers aged 15-17 years (95% CI: 27.5–34.6%).

Figure 6 Mobile children by individual age



Own calculations from NIDS Wave 1

⁵ The ‘mobility’ variable is derived from B1- in the adult questionnaire, or the equivalent B6 in the child questionnaire: “*In what year did the child move to this place?*” The year of move is recorded, or if never moved, the response category is 7777.

Mobility estimates for children of all race groups are shown in Table 7. When looking at the proportions alone, white children appear the most mobile group, followed by Indian children. However, the unweighted numbers are very small. Given the political and social history of the country, patterns of migration (and reasons for it) are likely to differ substantially between population groups. Table 7

Table 7 Child mobility by population group

<i>Pop group</i>	MOBILE CHILDREN AS A PROPORTION OF ALL CHILDREN			UNWEIGHTED POPULATION NUMBERS			
	<i>Weighted</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Un-weighted</i>	<i># moved</i>	<i># never moved</i>	<i>missing</i>	<i>All children</i>
African	0.1919653	0.0094654	0.1328	1,216	7,900	41	9,157
Coloured	0.25213	0.0277617	0.1614	235	1,195	26	1,456
Asian/Indian	0.3967901	0.1115355	0.2276	28	94	1	123
White	0.4589627	0.0564873	0.4424	119	145	5	269
Total	0.2131068	0.0091617	0.1452	1,598	9,334	73	11,005

Own calculations from NIDS Wave 1

Over time, it will be possible to track the whereabouts of children in relation to their mothers. In Wave 1 we are again limited to retrospective analysis, where it is apparent that some ‘mobile’ children (who have moved since birth) are co-resident with their ‘mobile’ mothers (who have moved since adulthood). In order to assess the extent to which children have co-migrated with their mothers, it was necessary to first link children to resident mothers through the person code, and then refer to the reported year of move to the current place for the mother and child respectively in order to determine whether or not the move was simultaneous. The process is shown in Table 8 below:

Table 8 Child and mother co-mobility

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Proportion</i>
Total children in sample	11 005	
Children with co-resident mothers	7 617	69%
<i>Of children with co-resident mothers:</i>		
Children who are mobile (moved since birth)	1 063	14%
<i>Of mobile children with co-resident mothers:</i>		
Children whose mothers are mobile (moved since adulthood)	946	89%
<i>Of children with co-resident mothers where both child and mother are mobile:</i>		
Child and mother moved in the same year	677	71%
Mother moved first, child moved later	226	24%
Child moved first, mother moved later	53	6%

Own calculations from NIDS Wave 1

From this we can see that a large proportion of mobile children moved together with their mobile mothers. A quarter (unweighted) joined their mother, who moved first. In a small number of cases, the child moved first and was later joined by the mother.

Characteristics of children with non-resident mothers

Table 9 below presents some initial comparisons for children who are co-resident and not co-resident with their living mothers.

Table 9 Child characteristics and poverty levels, by maternal residence

	Mother co-resident			Mother living elsewhere	
	<i>Prop</i>	<i>95% CI</i>	<i>P value</i> ¹	<i>Prop</i>	<i>95% CI</i>
parents married	39.5%	(37.1 -41.9)	P<0.001	13.7%	(10.9 -16.5)
child has birth certificate	94.1%	(93.3 -95.0)	P<0.001	91.0%	(89.0 -92.9)
per capita income < R515	60.6%	(58.2 -63.0)	P<0.001	71.1%	(67.6 -74.6)
rural 'tribal' area	40.0%	(37.9 -42.2)	P<0.001	56.6%	(52.6 -60.6)
traditional dwelling	17.3%	(15.7 -19.0)	P<0.001	27.4%	(23.9 -30.9)
over-crowded dwelling	27.4%	(24.9 -29.8)	P=0.06	23.4%	(19.6 -27.3)
toilet on site (flush / VIP)	38.7%	(36.3 -41.1)	P<0.001	25.6%	(22.1 -29.1)
piped water on site	65.2%	(63.0 -67.4)	P<0.001	56.1%	(52.2 -60.0)

	Mother co-resident			Mother living elsewhere	
	<i>Median</i>	<i>Interquartile range</i>	<i>P value</i> ²	<i>Median</i>	<i>Interquartile range</i>
Total household income	R 2,428	(R1,297 - R5,122)	P<0.001	R 2,040	(R1,173 - R3,540)
HH income from wages	R 2,093	(R870 - R5,628)	P<0.001	R 1,200	(R526 - R2980)
HH income from grants	R 740	(R400 - R1270)	P<0.001	R 940	(R630 - R1470)

Own calculations based on NIDS 2008, using the weights provided

¹ chi-2 test accounting for survey design

² Wilcoxon rank-sum test, unweighted

The analysis shows that children who live apart from their mothers also live in poorer conditions, with poorer access to basic services such as water and sanitation. They also and experience greater levels of income poverty, as illustrated both by the greater proportion of children without co-resident mothers living below the R515 per capita poverty line, and the lower median household income – despite a higher median income from social grants. While over 90% of children are reported to have birth certificates, the proportion in possession of birth certificates is lower for children whose mothers are absent than for those with a co-resident mother. This is important, because identity documents are essential requirements for accessing poverty alleviation programmes, including social grants.

The relatively poor outcomes for children with absent mothers are undoubtedly related to location: children without co-resident mothers are disproportionately concentrated in rural areas, where municipal services tend to be inferior and employment opportunities scarce.

Further multivariate analysis is needed to explore in greater depth the poverty dynamics related to child and maternal co-residence. With the promise of future waves of the panel survey every two years, this is an opportune time to start planning a longitudinal analysis that will monitor child poverty and well-being outcomes, in the context of maternal migration and child mobility.

Conclusion

Can we assume that child migration patterns replicate that of adults? Probably not. Existing data suggests that in most instances of labour migration from rural areas, children remain at the home of origin – even when the migrant is the mother. This is made possible by the availability of grandparents at home, who can provide care and, increasingly, financial support through social grants (poor skip-generation households potentially receive both child support grants and old age pensions).

But there are questions that should be raised. What determines the observable migration patterns? On the basis of a retrospective analysis of child and adult mobility, and co-residence arrangements for children and mothers in particular, it appears that around of fifth of children are mobile in that they have moved place since birth, either moving with their mother, independently of their mother, or following their mother. What precipitates and enables these moves?

Three and a half million children have a living mother who is not co-resident in the same household. Conversely, 37% of mothers aged 18-49 report having at least one child who is absent from their household. If all things were equal, what choices would migrant mothers make about care arrangements for their children? And what are some of the constraints on the choices they make? We know, for instance, that temporary migration is made possible by the existence of another (rural) home, where children can be cared for while mothers work, or seek work, elsewhere. But to what extent does temporary migration persist in order to maintain a rural home, so that there is a safe place for children to grow up, with free childcare on hand? How might migration decisions be affected if cities offered better housing options for families, affordable child care and safer living environments for children? How might changes in employment opportunities affect child care choices?

The purpose of this work is not to promote the nuclear family, but to enquire about how families – and particularly mothers – make decisions about where they and their children live and how their households are configured. I believe that environmental constraints such as housing backlogs, poor living conditions in informal settlements, risks to personal safety and lack of child care options may influence the strategic choices that mothers make. Choice is important because child rights frameworks, and the duties of parents towards their children, require that decisions are made in the best interests of children.

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