

TRANSPORT AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE EASTERN CAPE: A CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore and document, through the use of qualitative data, children and young people's experiences and perceptions of mobility and transport constraints in accessing social services such as health, education and participation in day to day activities in remote rural, rural, peri-urban and urban settings using three study settlements of the OR Tambo District Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa: Bolani, Mthambalala, Mthumbane in Port St Johns and Ngangelizwe in Mthatha. This paper forms part of a broader study investigating the transport and mobility constraints of children in Sub-Saharan Africa involving three countries: Ghana, Malawi and South Africa. Recent studies have noted that mobility and transport constraints and the lack of adequate and reliable information can have considerable adverse impact on children's access to regular essential services such as education with further knock-on impacts on subsequent livelihood opportunities. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that improving mobility and access to socio-economic opportunities for children is crucial if the Millennium Development Goals of Universal Primary Education, Promotion of Gender Equity and Empowerment of Women, and Reduction of Child Mortality are to be achieved.

Keywords

Children, transport, mobility, accessibility, experiences, perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Background

The aim of this paper is to explore and document, through the use of qualitative data, children and young people's experiences and perceptions of mobility and transport constraints in accessing social services such as health, education and participation in day to day activities in remote rural, rural, peri-urban and urban settings using three study settlements of the OR Tambo District Municipality (ORTDM) located in the Province of the Eastern Cape in South Africa: Bolani, Mthambalala, Mthumbane in Port St Johns and Ngangelizwe in Mthatha. This paper forms part of a broader study investigating the transport and mobility constraints of children in Sub-Saharan Africa involving three countries: Ghana, Malawi and South Africa. Recent studies have noted that mobility and transport constraints and the lack of adequate and reliable information can have considerable adverse impact on children's access to regular essential services such as education with further knock-on impacts on subsequent livelihood opportunities. Furthermore it is acknowledged that improving mobility and access to socio-economic opportunities for children is crucial if the Millennium Development Goals of Universal Primary Education, Promotion of Gender Equity and Empowerment of Women, and Reduction of Child Mortality are to be achieved (Mashiri et al, 2005).

The dearth of qualitative research in South Africa exploring in depth, the spatial mobility and travel experiences of children and the youth as transport stakeholders in their own right, has to some extent, resulted in policies and programmes bereft of innovative responses to the needs of this extensive constituency. Clearly, the need to explore and describe the mobility and transport experiences of children and the youth with a view to influencing policy development and practice cannot be over-emphasized.

Children's mobility and access characteristics

Mashiri et al (2005) scanned literature relating to children's transport and mobility constraints, experiences and perceptions in South Africa and only found anecdotal evidence. Buiten and Mashiri (2007) note that traditional transport planning has tended to focus on addressing the needs of mainstream commuters through improved transport infrastructure and services, leaving out a significant number of existing and prospective users especially rural and peri-urban dwellers. This is an enormous oversight given that the majority of the population in South Africa is made up of children and young people and the fact that children are a major stakeholder in transport (Mashiri et al, 2005). Clearly, exploring and understanding this group's mobility and transport constraints and needs is essential for developing well informed transport policies and strategies covering a constituency soon to be tomorrow's decision makers. In this regard, Porter et al's (2008) work exploring mobility and immobility among urban youth in sub-Saharan Africa is instructive. The main objective of this paper then is to untangle the often complex, sometimes subtle and hidden physical and mobility constraints that prevent children from easily accessing and taking advantage of socio-economic opportunities.

Recent studies have noted that children from poor communities in sub-Saharan Africa including South Africa face severe physical mobility and transport barriers (Porter & Blaufuss 2002; Mashiri et al, 2005). These barriers are often related to the lack of affordable and adequate transport infrastructure and services forcing children to assume the role of transporters themselves, inhibiting children from attending school regularly and compelling children to travel distances of over ten kilometres mostly on foot to access essential services (Mashiri et al, 2002; Mashiri et al, 2004).

Holtmann and Jans van Vuuren (2007) note that in South Africa, the need for mobility exposes most citizens to a range of environments during the course of any given day. In order to access education, health and other social services, some form of travelling is required either by walking or using private or public transport. In this regard, for example, children's daily quest to access education, health and social networks often exposes them to possible anti-social behaviour and crime, leading to general fear and anxiety. Recent work by Kruger and Landman (2005) showed a high correlation between crime and the physical environment. The authors went on to illustrate that people from impoverished communities who relied heavily on public and non-motorized transport modes because they cannot afford private automobiles were more likely to suffer the consequences of crime and other anti-social behaviour. They further argued that the poor spend considerable amounts of time and money travelling further away from their homes thereby increasing the chances of victimisation whilst walking or on public transport. Inadequate infrastructure and services provision for pedestrians exacerbates the problem as this contributes to the significant vulnerability and probable victimisation of pedestrians many of whom are indeed children.

Work undertaken by Porter et al (2006) highlighting the barriers experienced by children in accessing education notes the following mobility related factors influencing school attendance:

- Age, gender, birth order, physical disability and family socio-economic status may affect which children are able to travel long distances to school, particularly if travel is unaccompanied and involves unreliable public transport.
- Local agricultural conditions and associated economic production patterns affect the daily chores that a child is expected to perform, such as herding cattle and collecting water and firewood.
- The distances between the locations of these activities and the transport available affect how much extra time a child has.
- Inadequate and/or costly transport for moving farm produce and other goods may cause families to use their children, especially girls, as porters, which delays or prevents their attendance.
- Where public transport is costly and/or irregular, boys may be able to use bicycles to reach distant schools; on the other hand, the time girls spend on domestic tasks (and sometimes cultural conventions) tend to restrict their opportunities to cycle.

- Teachers are often reluctant to take up positions in more remote village schools because poor transport options will isolate them from regular interaction with colleagues and other people of similar social status. Such villages may be without adequate teachers for long periods and teachers posted to these locations quite often take regular unofficial absences.

LOCATION OF THE STUDY AREAS

The study areas are located in the local municipalities of Port St Johns and King Sabata Dalindyebo, two of seven ORTDM municipalities situated in the Eastern Cape Province (Mashiri et al, 2009). With 64.6% of its 1 604 411 people living in poverty, ORTDM is considered to be one of the poorest districts in South Africa, and yet, one of the most populous. The poverty situation sketched above is worsened by the fact that the majority of the population is made up of young people with about 45% of the population below 15 years and 58% of the population below the age of 20 years suggesting relatively high dependency ratios (ibid) – and by extension, severe pressure meagre household incomes. While Port St Johns is said to be one of the poorest local authorities in the district (in terms of all poverty measures), King Sabata Dalindyebo is the most economically active especially given the central role played by the economically dominant town of Mthatha. (http://sandmc.pwv.gov.za/comp/Profiles/Provincial_Profiles/EC_OR_Tambo.htm).

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDY AREAS

Ngangelizwe – Mthatha

Ngangelizwe, a high density low-income township, located five kilometers east of Mthatha central business district was the urban study area. The township is characterised by a mixture of formal dwellings close to Mthatha and dense informal settlements further away from the centre of town. While this township is served by a variety of public transport modes such as minibus taxis, the majority of the population walk to fulfil their travel and transport needs. Service provision in Ngangelizwe has improved over the years with a considerable number of households having access to running water, sanitation and electricity. However, with the ever mushrooming of informal dwellings, service provision to these new settlements remains a challenge. At least sixty percent of the population is reported to be unemployed with related impacts such as poverty, squalor and crime.

Mthumbane – Port St Johns

Mthumbane, located approximately five kilometres from the sleepy tourism town centre of Port St Johns where most services such as shops, clinic, post office, senior secondary school and municipal offices are to be found, was the peri-urban study area. Although public transport is available all year round most people, most of whom are children walk from Mthumbane to the local town centre to access essential services often because transport is largely unaffordable. There is only one access road from Mthumbane to the centre of town used by both pedestrians and motorised vehicles. The narrow road, which is punctuated by sharp curves, was not designed to accommodate both pedestrians and motorized vehicles simultaneously, often leading to conflict situations with deleterious consequences for pedestrians. Except for a few humps designed to force motorists to reduce speeds, traffic calming measures have not been systematically applied in the town. Considering that the same road leads to the beach where people gather to have fun, the danger posed through drunken or careless driving on pedestrian many of whom are children is that much more pronounced. Learners travel from Mthumbane to town where the schools are located, mostly on foot. The safety and security of learners and other out of school children has certainly been compromised through driver behaviour, road design, lack of visible enforcement and poverty.

Mthambalala – Port St Johns

Mthambalala, located about thirty kilometres from Port St Johns town was chosen as the rural study site with limited services. Besides subsistence farming, community members engage in informal income-generating activities such as fishing, craft making and beer brewing. In addition, aside of the clinic, the two primary schools, a general dealer's shop, there is little other socio-economic infrastructure. Villagers have to rely on irregular public transport services dispensed by a variety of modes including old minibuses, panelled vans, and light delivery vehicles for travel and

transport to and from the main rural service centres of Lusikisiki and Port St Johns. Although the main road to Mthambalala is relatively well-maintained, it is slippery, difficult and even treacherous in the wet season largely because of the rolling terrain posing some significant safety concerns, especially against a backdrop of speeding public transport drivers.

Bolani – Port St Johns

Bolani, a settlement further east of Mtambalala closer to the eastern seaboard and accessible only through an unpaved road (T59) which links with the R61 provincial road to either Lusikisiki to the north east or Port St Johns to the south, was chosen as the remote rural study site. Because of the non-existence of an all-weather road complete with bridges, Bolani is often inaccessible in the rainy season. As indicated above, these backlogs in infrastructure provision are exacerbated by the hilly and steep topography, sometimes covered with dense vegetation and dissected by rivers and streams prone to flush floods. The settlement is devoid of essential municipal services such as reticulated water, electricity and sanitation. Save for an infrequent mobile clinic, there are no healthcare services or schools in the settlement compelling the young and the old to walk long distances to access these services.

STUDY APPROACH

The study employed an innovative two strand qualitative methodology of data collection in order to understand children's daily mobility and transport experiences and perceptions:

Strand 1: Children administered questionnaires and documented responses about daily mobility and travel experiences and perceptions of their peers. They also documented their own perceptions and experiences by way of diaries. This stage of data gathering was undertaken in 2006 over a period of six months from February to July. Prior to this data gathering exercise, a one week training workshop had been undertaken to appraise the selected children from four schools in the Port St Johns Local Municipality of, and train them on, data gathering techniques. Children between the ages of nine and eighteen were taught how to conduct focus group discussions, generate mental maps, document activities in a diary, undertake transect walks, take appropriate photographs, observe phenomena, administer relevant questions, and follow-up on those questions.

Strand 2: Adult researchers drawn from local and national research institutions were involved in the same exercise. This phase was undertaken in 2007 over a period of ten months. Adult researchers administered qualitative survey questionnaires on children from the ages of nine to eighteen, their respective parents, undertook focus group discussions with school and non-schooling children, observations, accompanied walks as well as photographs. It is important to note that although quantitative methodologies were also used to gather data, this had not been analyzed at the time of writing this paper.

STUDY FINDINGS

General thematic responses from the children

In the first strand of the study methodology, children were able to conduct research as well as disseminate information and ideas around child-centered research among their peers. The children showed aptitude in eliciting information from their peers using a checklist of questions relating to their daily mobility and travel experiences. Children noted the risks associated with their travel and transport some of which adults would not have considered as challenges, for example, when walking to school, using public transport, collecting firewood and water, playing, and taking messages in and around the settlement. Some examples of the thematic responses given by the children are illustrated in the table below:

Theme	Urban: Ngangelizwe	Peri-Urban: Mthumbane	Rural: Mtambalala	Remote Rural: Bolani
Children's roles as transporters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurring provisions from the general dealers shop Accompanying the sick, the elderly and sometimes persons with disability to health facilities Taking messages around the settlement Procurring and selling various merchandise along the street or door-to-door 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurring provisions from the general dealers shop Accompanying the sick, the elderly and sometimes persons with disabilities to health facilities Taking messages around the settlement Procurring and selling various merchandise along the street or door-to-door 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fetching firewood, collecting water or produce from the field Procurring provisions from the general dealers shop Tendering sheep, goats and cattle or undertaking other household "must be done" chores Taking messages around the settlement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fetching firewood, collecting water or produce from the field Procurring provisions from the general dealer's shop Tendering sheep, goats and cattle or undertaking other household "must be done" chores Taking messages around the settlement
Safety and security issues associated with children's mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexual harassment and the fear of being raped Anxiety related to the possibility of being murdered Involvement in traffic accidents Criminal attacks especially for gadgets such as cell-phones Possibility of being chased by dogs as they walk Being a victim of anti-social behaviour especially by some out of school children or some 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexual harassment and the fear of being raped Anxiety related to the possibility of being murdered Involvement in traffic accidents Criminal attacks especially for gadgets such as cell-phones Possibility of being chased by dogs as they walk to and from service locations Inability to scale some of the physical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexual harassment and the fear of being raped Anxiety related to the possibility of being murdered Criminal attacks especially for gadgets such as cell-phones Inability to scale some of physical obstacles encountered on the way to school, such as ditches or dongas Fear of being washed away and drowning during flush floods or when rivers are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexual harassment and the fear of being raped Anxiety related to the possibility of being murdered Criminal attacks especially for gadgets such as cell-phones Inability to scale some of the physical obstacles encountered on the way to school, such as ditches or dongas Fear of being washed away and drowning during flush floods or when rivers are

	<p>drunken adults such as verbal abuse, threats, etc.</p>	<p>obstacles encountered on the way to school, such as ditches or dongas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supernatural risks associated with walking along graveyards and dense forest areas 	<p>overflowing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arriving at school with relatively wet clothes and muddy shoes because of the wet grass cutting across the path to school, which also tends to be muddy Possibility of being chased by dogs as they walk Possibility of snake bites, attacks from animals such as warthogs and monkeys particularly for children who have to walk through wooded areas Supernatural risks associated with walking along graveyards and dense forest areas 	<p>overflowing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arriving at school with relatively wet clothes and muddy shoes because of the wet grass cutting across the path to school, which also tends to be muddy Possibility of being chased by dogs as they walk to service locations Supernatural risks associated with walking along graveyards and dense forest areas
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The responses enumerated above have implications in terms of the affected children's health, approach and attitude to education (for example, the timing and the duration of stay in the system) and their general outlook in life. The respondents (the children) had a raft of suggestions (ranging from reducing the infrastructure and service backlogs to spatial integration in settlement design) to address their transport and development concerns which they felt needed to be aired at either their local transport forum or even at the full council seating.

In the second strand of the study methodology, adult researchers were involved in data gathering employing qualitative survey checklists, conducting focus group discussions with children, accompanied walks and eliciting life stories. This mixed method methodology unraveled the following:

- Children's mobility constraints and needs in terms of accessing essential services such as health, education and social networks.
- Roles that children play in fulfilling their transport duties.
- Impacts associated with the lack of adequate and affordable transport infrastructure and services.

Access to education: Children's experiences and perceptions

The consensus view of children, their parents and other key informants who were interviewed in the four study settlements revolved around the existence of severe mobility and transport constraints which prevented children from fully participating and taking advantage of the socio-economic opportunities that the country had to offer. Respondents also cited the risks associated with walking and using public transport to and from school. Highlights of issues relating to the journey to and from school include the following:

- Over ninety percent of learners walk to and from school, particularly those who live close to these educational facilities. In many cases, there is no transport service available particularly in deep rural areas such as Bolani. Given the poverty that pervades the study areas, transport services are often unaffordable even when available.
- The average distance that children walk to school is about six kilometres. However, walking six kilometres can be an arduous and interminably long exercise, particularly in view of the typical study sites terrain as described above, which tends to have a bearing on, for example, the age at which children start school, their levels of concentration in and out of class, and consequent grades in class, and their attitude towards school particularly in view of corporal punishment often meted to late comers at school.
- Minibus taxis, buses, and organised contract transport employing a variety of modes such as panelled vans and light delivery vehicles constitute the 'legal' public transport service options available for the few who can afford the fares.
- While the bicycle could be considered an ideal mode for learner transport, affordability considerations have meant only a few learners own and use them to access services.
- Learners often arrive late and tired or do not go to school at all especially during heavy rains as they are cut off completely, which among other factors, eventually affect their grades in class. The threat of receiving corporal punishment for arriving late at school is always embedded in their decision matrix.

Children and parents cited safety concerns associated with traveling to and from school as a major challenge as enumerated above. As a result, some parents only allow their children to start school at the age of ten to ensure they have the mental and physical stamina to scale the rigours of accessing schools, and perhaps increase their chances in life by continuing with their education. Compared to relatively well-resourced urban children, who start school at seven years old, a pattern that describes a widening chasm in the children's probable life trajectories begins to emerge.

Access to health: Children's experiences and perceptions

Mobility and transport are important factors in accessing healthcare services. Findings from the study indicate that children were negatively affected by the lack of adequate and affordable transport services, for example:

- Children reported the non-existence of emergency transport services to take patients to the hospital – occasionally donkey and ox carts are used to ferry patients in critical condition.
- When they or someone else in the household is ill, they often wake up early to get to the clinic (and miss school, sometimes for minor ailments) because it is far, and once there, they wait for long hours in queues to get a service.
- Because of the pressure on the few health facilities with medicines, some healthcare officials tend to become impatient, rude and sometimes abusive to patients and their helpers (including children) – a situation describing low levels of service. Visitations to a health facility after school are sometimes futile as their doors are often closed early.
- Poor road infrastructure including broken bridges inhibits movement of mobile clinics and emergency transport services particularly in inclement weather and therefore sick children in remote settlements such as Mtambalala and Bolani are adversely affected.
- For serious illnesses poor parents often borrow to travel and stay at a district hospital, which impoverishes them even further into a downward spiralling poverty trap.

Children's experiences and perceptions as transporters

As transporters, children in the study area carry a variety of items of varying weights mostly on their heads, for example, heavy items such as beer crates, maize meal, paraffin and groceries for household consumption or for resale at tuck shops to supplement their meager incomes. They also transport in the same manner other essential items such water and firewood. Given the deforestation that characterize communities such as Mthambalala, the trip to firewood collection points can be particularly taxing especially for girl children who are often allocated this task.

“...When it rains it becomes so muddy and slippery to walk to the forest to fetch firewood. The children have to be very careful as it is also steep...One day Abigail fell after she slipped and injured her arm carrying a load of firewood and we had no money to take her to the hospital...”

Transcript from an interview with a parent in Bolani – April 2007

While no child is exempt from fulfilling their role as a transporter, boys and elder girls in the household carry the heaviest loads (for example, twenty-litre containers of water) with possible health implications. It is interesting to note that even a relatively light item carried over a long distance becomes 'heavy'. It is also important not to lose sight of the fact that children undertake most of these tasks in the morning before going to school (which often has a bearing on their performance at school as indicated elsewhere), after school or on weekends.

In a small number of cases, children have access to some form of transport technology such as the wheelbarrow or the donkey-cart. Where such technology exists, children transport even heavier items such as bricks or bags of cement. Wheelbarrows are also used to carry groceries from a public transport drop-off point to the household – which is not always an easy job given the scattered spatial location pattern of homesteads and the attendant difficult terrain especially in the rural study sites (see also Mashiri, 2004). Boys seem to have more access to transport technology than girls which often implies that the burden falls much more heavily on girl children as most households do not have access to these technologies – the importance of simple and affordable technologies to lessen the burden especially on girl children and improve productivity cannot be over-emphasized. It is instructive to note that while the use of technology not only lightens their burden (vis-à-vis head-loading for example), but also improves their productivity

(potentially freeing up more time for school work and play), it often means that the household allocates more work to them.

Besides their roles as transporters, children also have to undertake essential trips (tasks that involve travelling) such as buying household goods from local shops, going fishing for household consumption, accompanying elderly members of the household to pension payout points and the sick to healthcare centres, conveying messages around the settlement, and leisure, trips such as visiting friends and relatives and going to church.

Children's experiences and perceptions of their safety and security

Children and parents cited safety and security concerns associated with traveling to and from school as a major issue. In this regard, many incidences of intimidation and anti-social behaviour were reported such as:

- Theft of mobile phones, watches, calculators or books
- Girls being harassed or assaulted on the way to and from school usually by boys and youths who do not attend school. Some of these truant boys (*tsotsi's*) especially in the urban and peri-urban sites are said to even carry knives, and occasionally guns, and are suspected of using drugs or operating under the influence of alcohol. This is often exacerbated by gang rivalry which creates a sense of fear, anxiety and helplessness.
- Both boys and girls being afraid to use certain routes to school because of risks associated with notorious sections along those routes, for example, young girls, fear being kidnapped or raped particularly those having to walk through wooded areas or notorious neighbourhoods to school.
- Bullying and unprovoked fights wherein older boys take advantage of younger children by forcibly taking away their books or lunch.

“...When I walk to school with my friends there are some boys who follow us and ask us for money and our cell phones. They frighten us because they are high on drugs and I am scared that they will do some bad things to us...I don't like to walk alone to and from school...”

Transcript from an interview involving a school attending girl – July 2007

In terms of safety, children especially younger ones face the risk of being knocked down by speeding cars particularly when they have to cross a big road. This is worsened by the fact that roads do not have pedestrian sidewalks, which forces learners to compete with motorized vehicles in an unequal duel in which children often pay with their lives. In the urban study sites, the absence of extensive traffic calming measures inadvertently encourages motorists to speed posing a danger especially to the younger children whose skills in the assessment of space and risk is not yet fully developed.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The aim of this paper has been to graphically highlight the experiences and perceptions of children in their daily quest to access and take advantage of socio-economic opportunities in their communities, such as access to educational and health facilities, employing qualitative data collected from four study areas representing a cross-section of rural and urban settlement typologies. The findings indicate that although there are certain differences and nuances to specific problem areas, by and large, children, particularly those from poor households and communities encounter a variety of common mobility and access constraints. These constraints often have a significant bearing on their life chances. What is also evidently clear is that some of the challenges they encounter are markedly different from the problems adults face. Without this insight from the children themselves, it is unlikely that adult policy makers and planners would have foreseen these challenges with enough clarity and a singleness of purpose to include them in policy interventions. Thus the need to undertake such studies across the country to genuinely

understand the challenges children face as transport stakeholders in their own right with a view to generating and implementing relevant interventions cannot be over-emphasized.

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