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Migration patterns among adolescents from rural Malawi*

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Abstract

This paper identifies patterns of internal migration among adolescents from rural Malawi using bivariate and multivariate analyses, with an emphasis on highlighting the difference between girls and boys. The data come from the third and fourth rounds of the longitudinal Malawi Schooling and Adolescent Survey (MSAS). The sample consists of 2,341 adolescents aged 16-19 in 2010. Preliminary results reveal that adolescents in Malawi are quite mobile, with more than half of the sample having moved in the past year, mostly between rural villages and then trading centers. As expected, girls are less mobile than boys both in terms of proportion moved as well as distance moved. The main reason for moving that girls cite is marriage while boys cite economic opportunity. Related to this finding is the one that a greater proportion of in-school and never married girls subsequently move than out of school and married girls. Greater proportions of adolescents from wealthier households move but this pattern is more evident for boys than girls. Migrant girls are more likely to be working than non-migrant girls. It is migrant boys, however, that are most likely to reap the benefits of an income stream via paid work, although they are also more likely to have discontinued their education than non-migrant boys.

Introduction

With a per capita gross domestic product that ranks it among the 10 poorest nations in the world, Malawi is a country that faces multiple development challenges (The World Factbook, 2011). Its total fertility rate of 5.5 children per women is one of the highest in the world. This had led to an expansive population pyramid characterized by what is generally known as a youth bulge. Adolescents, defined as being between the ages of 10 and 24, make up nearly 33% of the population of Malawi (NSO, Malawi and ORC Macro, 2005).

Adolescence is a challenging period in the life cycle. Along with the physiological changes that occur during these years, adolescents will experience several major life events in a relatively compressed time period. Most of these events, such as marriage and parenthood, are considered markers of entry into adulthood. Another such important event is their participation in the labor force. While it may not be the first instance of work for adolescents – given the high prevalence of child labor in settings like Malawi – it is often the first time that they are taking up full time work (no longer in combination with schooling), and often as primary earners bearing the responsibility for themselves and others.

All these life events are interrelated and additionally connected to the phenomenon of migration, which is the primary focus of this paper. In a poor country like Malawi where 80% of the population lives in rural areas (World Factbook, 2011), young people are bound to move in search of education and economic opportunity, and for a whole host of other reasons. Migration is always a difficult phenomenon to study and the quantitative evidence on it is sparse, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and certainly in Malawi. Adolescent migration deserves consideration separate from adult migration and child migration precisely because it is characterized by elements of both those migration processes.

This paper makes a contribution to the literature by presenting a descriptive analysis of migration patterns among adolescents aged 16-19, who were living in rural Malawi when they were first interviewed in 2007. Throughout the paper, differences in the nature of male and female migration are highlighted. Using simple bivariate tables and multivariate regression, we examine the characteristics of migrants and determinants of migration to see if commonly held beliefs about migration are indeed true.

Data

Data for this analysis come from Rounds 3 and 4 of the Malawi Schooling and Adolescent Survey (MSAS) which annually follows a sample of 2,650 adolescents aged 14-16 in 2007, the year the survey was initiated. MSAS is a school-based study that was started in two rural districts of Malawi, Balaka and Machinga. In each district, 30 primary schools were selected, with the

probability of a particular school being included proportional to its enrollment in 2006. Five male students and five female students at each age of 14, 15, and 16 were randomly selected from school registers recording enrollment at the beginning of the 2007 school year. The out-of-school sample was selected from a listing of adolescents not in school, generated through interviews with head teachers and in-school adolescents. The final sample included 1,764 in-school adolescents and 886 out-of-school adolescents. Attrition rates are fairly low, with 88% of adolescents from Round 1 being re-interviewed in Round 4, yielding a sample of 2,341 adolescents between the ages of 16-19 for this analysis.

One important point especially relevant to this study is that only adolescents that are still living in Malawi are interviewed in any given year. Each year, interviewers attempt to contact all respondents from Round 1 but if it is learned that they have left the country, those adolescents are not interviewed. This analysis is thus necessarily a study of internal migration. Another important point is that the adolescents referred to herein as migrants are not necessarily leaving home; they may be returning home in many cases.

The most comprehensive questions on migration were asked in the last round for which data are available – Round 4 from the year 2010. Information from Round 3 allows us to have accurate information on their exact physical location a year ago. Since adolescents are more likely to migrate as they get older, using data from a later round allows us to observe more movement and also obtain more precise estimates. The next section presents preliminary bivariate tables describing elements of the adolescent migration process and characteristics of migrant and non-migrant boys and girls.

Results

How much?

We begin by asking how common a phenomenon adolescent migration in Malawi is. We see from Table 1 that more than half of our sample (54%) moved in the past year, with 17% having moved twice or more. A smaller proportion of girls moved than boys, and girls were also less likely to have moved more than once since last interview.

Table 1: Percent moved in past year

Moved	Girls	Boys	Boys and Girls
Did not move	51	41	46
Moved once	36	38	37
Moved at least twice	13	21	17
Missing	.3	.5	.3
Total	100	100	100
<i>N</i>	<i>1191</i>	<i>1150</i>	<i>2341</i>

Where?

Tables 2 and 3 shed light on where the adolescents are moving to. Examining the destination of the first move since last interview reveals that a little less than half stayed within the same district, with girls more likely to stay within district. A much larger proportion of boys moved to a different district. A small number of adolescents, mostly boys, moved to a different country (Mozambique or South Africa) and then back to Malawi by Round 4.

Table 2: Destinations of migrating adolescents (%)

Moved	Girls	Boys	Boys and Girls
Within district	56	40	48
Different district	44	57	51
Different country	1	3	2
Total	100	100	100
<i>N</i>	423	434	857

Tables 3A and 3B show a matrix of the type of origin and destination, where origin is adolescent's location in Round 3. Not surprisingly a majority of the migrating adolescents started off in a rural village (350 girls, 351 boys). But the notable finding from these tables is that most of the migration is from a rural village to another rural village, particularly for girls (71%), followed by rural village to trading center (19%). Those who started in a trading center also mostly moved to a rural village, or to another trading center. More boys than girls move from a rural village to a major urban center (11% boys, 7% girls).

Table 3A: Origin and destinations of migrant adolescents girls (%)

Round 4	Major urban center	Boma (district center/ govt offices)	Trading center	Rural village	Other	Total	<i>N</i>
Round 3							
Major urban center	36	0	0	64	0	100	11
Boma (district center)	40	60	0	0	0	100	5
Trading center	2	2	29	65	2	100	51
Rural village	6	2	19	71	1	100	350
Other	0	0	0	50	50	100	4
Total	7	3	20	69	2	100	-
<i>N</i>	29	11	83	291	7	-	421

Table 3B: Origin and destinations of migrant adolescents boys (%)

Round 4	Major urban center	Boma (district center/ govt offices)	Trading center	Rural village	Other	Total	<i>N</i>
Round 3							
Major urban center	21	0	0	79	0	100	14
Boma (district center)	10	0	10	80	0	100	10
Trading center	4	4	25	66	2	100	55
Rural village	11	5	30	51	4	100	351
Other	0	0	0	100	0	100	2
Total	10	4	28	54	4	100	-
<i>N</i>	45	18	119	235	15	-	432

Why?

Table 4 is one of the most informative tables, summarizing the reasons adolescents cited for their move. For girls, the most common reason was marriage (rare for boys), followed by a move with parents or to rejoin parents. School reasons include moves to a better school (much more common for boys) as well as moves for the purpose of attending secondary school (similar for boys and girls). Strikingly, the most common reason cited by boys, economic opportunity (26%), is the least cited major reason for girls (7%).

Table 4: Reasons for first move in past year (%)

Reason	Girls	Boys	Boys and Girls
Marriage	32	4	18
Moved with/rejoined parents	25	20	22
School reasons	9	17	13
Help relatives	9	9	9
Economic opportunity	7	26	16
Other	18	23	22
Total	100	100	100
<i>N</i>	418	425	843

Who?

In this section, we delve a little into the background of migrant adolescents starting with household wealth. A greater proportion of adolescents from wealthier quintiles move compared to adolescents from poorer quintiles. This is true of girls as well as boys although the distribution is more skewed for boys.

Table 5: Percent of each wealth quintile in round 3 that moved

Wealth quintile R3	Girls	Boys	Boys and Girls
Poorest	29	27	28
Poor	29	35	32
Middle	32	30	31
Rich	32	39	36
Richest	43	46	44
Total	32	35	34
<i>N</i>	359	372	731

While similar proportions of boys in school and out of school moved after being interviewed in Round 3, there is a distinct difference for girls. Girls in school are much more likely to move than girls out of school (37% compared to 30%).

Table 6: Percent migrating among those in and out of school in round 3

	Girls	Boys	Boys and Girls
Out of school	30	36	32
In school	37	34	35
Total	32	35	34
<i>N</i>	359	372	731

Marital status at Round 3 seems to matter more for the subsequent migration of girls than boys. A greater proportion of unmarried girls moved between rounds (presumably for marriage or to be with parents).

Table 7: Percent migrating among those unmarried and married in round 3

	Girls	Boys	Boys and Girls
Never married	35	35	35
Ever married	29	36	30
Total	32	35	34
<i>N</i>	358	372	730

After the move

This final section highlights some characteristics of migrants at last interview. Tables 8A and 8B echo findings from previous tables – migrant boys are much more likely than non-migrant boys to be engaged in paid work while the reverse is true for unpaid work. Migrant girls are more likely to engage in paid and unpaid work than non-migrant girls. Also of note is the fact that the gap between girls and boys in proportion participating in paid work is far larger than the gap in proportion participating in unpaid work.

Table 8A: Percent working for pay among migrants and non-migrants

	Girls	Boys	Boys and Girls
Non-migrants	11	29	20
Migrants	12	36	24
Total	11	31	21
<i>N</i>	<i>133</i>	<i>358</i>	<i>491</i>

Table 8B: Percent working without pay among migrants and non-migrants

	Girls	Boys	Boys and Girls
Non-migrants	25	35	30
Migrants	27	32	30
Total	26	34	30
<i>N</i>	<i>305</i>	<i>390</i>	<i>695</i>

Far more boys are in school than girls. Migrant boys are less likely to be in school than non-migrant boys. Migrant girls are slightly more likely to be in school than non-migrant girls.

Table 9: Percent in school among migrants and non-migrants

	Girls	Boys	Boys and Girls
Non-migrants	23	52	37
Migrants	26	43	34
Total	24	48	36
<i>N</i>	<i>285</i>	<i>552</i>	<i>837</i>

Far more girls are married than boys but there is not much difference in proportion married between migrants and non-migrants, neither for boys nor for girls.

Table 10: Percent ever married among migrants and non-migrants

	Girls	Boys	Boys and Girls
Non-migrants	62	8	36
Migrants	65	11	38
Total	63	10	37
<i>N</i>	<i>738</i>	<i>108</i>	<i>846</i>

Summary and Discussion

This abstract presented some preliminary findings on adolescent migration in Malawi. The full paper will extend this analysis to a multivariate framework to allow a finer-grained examination of the associations of each of these factors to migration, net of other factors.

Simple bivariate tables reveal that adolescents in Malawi are quite mobile, with more than half of the sample having moved at least once in the past year. As expected, girls are less mobile than boys both in terms of proportion moving as well as distance moved. The main reason for moving that girls cite is marriage while boys cite economic opportunity. Greater proportions of adolescents from wealthier quintiles move but the pattern is more evident for boys than girls. This is probably related to the different reasons why girls and boys move – the practice of girls moving after marriage cuts across wealth lines whereas boys from wealthier families have more economic opportunities as well as the resources to move. Related to this finding is the one that a greater proportion of in-school and never married girls move subsequently than out of school and married girls, likely because of subsequent marriage. Migrant girls are more likely to be working than non-migrant girls. It is migrant boys, however, that are most likely to reap the benefits of an income stream via paid work, although they are more likely to have discontinued their education than non-migrant boys.

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