Linkages Between Young People’s Physical Mobility, Health And Well-being: Studies From Rural And Urban Malawi

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Introduction
Children and youth, under 18 years have received little attention in transport & mobility studies and transport policy have been focused on older age groups. This has raised serious concerns, given that children and young people comprise over half the population of many poor countries. Improving mobility and access to health facilities for girls and boys has massive implications for their subsequent livelihood potential. It is crucial to many of the Millennium Development Goals, notably, reduced child mortality, promoting gender equality and empowering women.

Objectives
•To investigate the linkages between young people’s health, well-being, mobility and mobility potential in Malawi.
•To compare the impact of mobility and transport constraints on young people’s health and well-being across diverse types of geographical location within Malawi.

Setting
Eight communities:
• Urban
• peri-urban
• rural
• Remote rural
In two regions:
• Mangochi Plains
• Blantyre Shire

Methods
Intensive qualitative ethnographic research into children and young people, approximately 40 in-depth interviews (some well-accompanied walks). 9 focus groups. 4 key informants and a focus group session in each of eight communities. Data collection was conducted mostly in Chichewa from June 2009 to July 2008. This collection and analysis of raw transcriptions is complemented by photographs, audio tapes, newspaper clippings, researchers’ ethnographic diaries and essays written by school children.

Results
There are clear connections between aspects of physical access in contributing locations, including distance, nature of terrain and physical obstacles, freedom to travel, availability of essential services and mobility constraints; the lack of transport services and the availability of local services. There is also a diversity of connections between young people’s mobility constraints and health and well-being.

Conclusions
Young people have a range of health-related mobility experiences both across various geographical locations and within different socio-economic contexts, which reflect various factors such as gender, age, social class, socio-economic, status patterns of health services and transport provision.

Recommendations
There is a need for further research on the potential health and well-being implications of Malawi’s new urban transport system (light rail) and consequences for young people’s livelihoods and urban transport and mobility. Greater use of non-motorised transport e.g. tandas, bicycle trailers could be a solution.

Research into Policy
Twice yearly Consultative Group meetings invited policy makers participation including:
• Government Ministries of Health, Transport, Education, Youth, Gender & Child Welfare
• Department of Road Traffic
• Local & international NGOs concerned with children and health
• Transport organisations & donors e.g. DFID

Background Note
This poster reports only a small part of a larger project which also has a child researcher component and a quantitative survey component which will be extended to Malawi’s northern region in 2010.

Project website: www.dur.ac.uk/child-mobility