

Migration and the transition to adulthood in contemporary Malawi

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Extended Abstract

The set of decisions made in the transition to adulthood -- including when to exit school, when to marry, and when to seek employment -- are critical with respect to a young person's well-being over the life course. Although research has most often focused on how the timing of school-leaving relates to future well-being, when first marriage and employment occurs is also likely to affect well-being at a later time, and yet, these two events are under-studied. For example, early marriage may have deleterious effects on women's future health or economic well-being, especially in settings where women generally have limited or constrained employment opportunities. Most importantly, because migration more often occurs in young adulthood than among the population of older adults, we suspect that these life events are strongly influenced by migration.

The objective of this work is to investigate the relationship between major life-cycle decisions, and migration patterns among young adults in contemporary Malawi. Our research questions are twofold. First, what are the socio-economic and demographic determinants of migration, and how are these conditioned by gender? Second, how do the timing of school-leaving, first marriage, and employment-seeking relate to migration patterns? To investigate these questions, we take advantage of new panel data, collected from a survey specifically designed to explore socioeconomic and demographic aspects of youth transitions to adulthood, which enable us to estimate the sequence of events as they relate to geographic mobility.

Between 2007 and 2009, the Marriage Transitions in Malawi (MTM) project collected innovative, longitudinal data from a random sample of 1,200 initially never-married women and men in the Central Region of Malawi. The study was designed to understand the links between pre-marital relationships and sexual activity, the transition into marriage, socioeconomic status, and HIV/AIDS. Respondents provided detailed information on socio-economic characteristics, marriage and fertility, and sexual partnering. Two particular features of this longitudinal data set stand out. First, respondents were interviewed at short intervals, up to five times within a 24-month window. Nearly all panel studies in sub-Saharan Africa conduct survey rounds at a minimum of yearly intervals (and often longer), which necessitates a reliance upon retrospective reporting of events, and may bias estimates due to recall error (such as on dating and marriage).¹ Second – and most relevant for this study – respondents who left the sample, due to relocation outside of the study site, were tracked by the research team. Such tracking allows us to follow mobile respondents' socioeconomic and demographic behaviors.

Although Malawi has a long history of international migration, the bulk of labor migration to the mines in South Africa ceased by the mid-1970s. In more recent years, the country has witnessed a massive increase in internal migration, both rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban.² The bulk of migration experiences today are internal, not international; in addition, many young people do migrate internally.³ In the most recent nationally representative survey in the country (the 2004/05 Integrated Household Survey, IHS2),

¹ The issue of recall bias in reporting events is also relevant for migration data. For example, lacking panel data which follows movers over time, studies may need to use life history calendars to collect information on moves, the timing of moves, and the reason for the move. This is the approach of Reed, Andrzejewski, and White (2010) in their study of how migration links with education, employment, marital status and childbearing in Ghana.

² See Englund 2002.

³ Sander and Maimbo (2003) characterize migration in sub-Saharan Africa as unique in that it is more intra-regional and domestic, rather than overseas. While McKenzie (2007) makes the case that youth constitute a large share of all migrants and that there are a unique set of related issue, in fact, he only looks at international migration.

at the time of the survey, 43 percent of young adults 16-22 years were living in a village/neighborhood other than the one where they were born. Since the IHS2 is not focused specifically on migration, it provides limited usefulness in understanding how much of this migration is linked to childhood (moving with parents), schooling (since secondary school facilities are not in most villages), marrying (moving to spouse's home village), or is economically motivated (such as job search). Moreover, because the IHS2 data are cross-sectional, we are unable to explore how geographic mobility is correlated with changes in other circumstances, such as dating and sexual behaviors, or employment, since we do not observe these data before *and* after the move.

In the MTM sample, we find a considerable amount of movement over the course of 24 months. As shown in Table 1, about one-quarter of the sample of young adults had moved by 2009 from her/his baseline community (at least 10 kilometers away).⁴ The reasons for these moves are varied (Table 2). From our tracking experience in the MTM, many of these moves may not fit well into traditional economic theories of migration.⁵ They can be temporary (a visit to relative which lasts a few months) and, for women for whom there are few labor market options, not related to employment. Still, they can be important factors affecting marriage, labor and schooling.

⁴ Here we focus only on a move that is defined by being more than 10 kilometers from the baseline location. Another way to think about moving is when a young person moves to a new household, even if within the same village. By that definition, we observe an even larger share of young adults 'moving.' More than 50 percent of both men and women resided with a different household head by the final round than in their baseline household.

⁵ Not surprisingly, in the economics literature on migration, migration is usually viewed from an economic perspective. Mobility by workers is a critical feature of models of development, such as the Lewis model and the Harris-Todaro model (Lewis, 1954; Harris and Todaro, 1970). The 'new economics of migration' (Stark and Bloom, 1985) emphasizes that migration is part of a general livelihood strategy for the initial household as a whole. In this model, movers are part of a welfare maximizing strategy for overall household income growth, as well as for risk sharing and easing credit constraints in the presence of incomplete or missing markets. For example, Rosenzweig and Stark (1989) find that migration patterns for marriage in rural India are consistent with risk-sharing strategies of the initial household.

In this study, we will use these unique data to explore the characteristics of those who migrate with those who do not, including how these two groups differ on the timing of three key life events--leaving school, entering the labor market, and marrying for the first time. We examine whether and how these patterns differ for men and women. Second, we study which socio-economic characteristics are associated with future migration, which in turn has implications for timing of life events. The results from this study are expected to have important policy implications regarding how successfully young people in poor countries do (or do not) transition from youth to adulthood.

Table 1: Migration of Young, Unmarried Adults from Baseline (summer 2007) to Final Round (summer 2009)

<i>Status in follow-up:</i>	Men: unmarried, 17-25 years at baseline	Women: unmarried, 14-21 years at baseline
% who stay in same area or within 10 KMs	78.8%	75.8%
% who move to a further location, in same district	11.4%	12.0%
% who move outside of the district	9.8%	12.2%
	100%	100%

Note: Data from the Marriage Transitions in Malawi Project. Sample excludes respondents who died or were not traced in the final round. Distance from baseline location is based on GPS data collected during the interview and not from self-reported distances.

Table 2: Reasons for Moving

	Men	Women
To work or look for work	39.2%	8.3%
To look for land	1.4%	0.5%
School	16.1%	25.7%
Follow parents/relative	2.8%	24.8%
Follow new spouse	5.5%	3.9%
To visit relative	20.7%	28.6%
Other	14.3%	8.3%
	100%	100%

Note: Sample of movers from MTM survey. Other reasons include seeking medical treatment, visiting a friend, argued with family, assisting sibling, and work contract expired.

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