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CONSEQUENCES OF RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION FOR
 FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN KENYA:
 SOME RESULTS AND SUGGESTED RESEARCH ORIENTATIONS

by
 Thomas S. Weisner

INTRODUCTION

Cities in Kenya and throughout East Africa are growing at a rate two to three times greater than the already rapid rate of population growth in the region as a whole. These cities are growing largely as a result of the migration of young, working age men, and sometimes families, seeking employment. This means that the men and the families moving to cities are likely to have young children of pre-school and school age. Indeed, many men seek employment in cities partly for the purpose of obtaining school fees.

The focus of this brief paper is on some possible influences that urban migration and city life may have on families and on children. The paper focuses on factors that may influence the family environment around the pre-school or school age child, the kinds of cognitive skills an urban child may bring to school, and the social-behavioural differences between urban and rural children.

The first section of the paper suggests four specific features of the urban setting which may be especially important in the lives of children. The next section reviews some evidence from recent work on the kinds of family units which result from urban migration of male household heads and presents some data on the mobility and school attendance in such families. The final sections present preliminary evidence concerning possible differences among children and comment on the strategy for doing further urban-rural comparisons. Family cognitive and social-behavioural domains have been selected for discussion because they seem most likely to have implications for educational and school related problems. There are, of course, many other areas of potential relevance both for educational and non-educational purposes where urban-rural studies are of importance.

It should be emphasized that this is a suggestive guide for further work on the effects of urban migration on school and educational problems, rather than a detailed and confirmed set of research results. A great deal of additional work needs to be done on the specifics of urban-rural differences, and classroom and school-related research should be an important component.

URBAN AND RURAL

To some extent labels like urban or rural should be regarded in the same way as other general category labels such as ethnic group names or tribal identification. These kinds of labels cannot, in themselves, be used to account for differences in children's behaviour or school performance. The content of the label needs to be clearly specified and broken down into specific relevant features. There are two aspects of urban and rural environments which show great differences and which may account for some of the cognitive and behavioural differences between city and country children. These include: 1) ecological and environmental factors relating to the family and domestic unit, like space, task

performance and daily routines; 2) value or ideological differences relating to modern or acculturative value orientations.

A powerful and specific effect of city life on families and children is a change in the tasks and daily routines of both parents and children. Adults who are not working at wage jobs and children staying in an urban room have far fewer tasks to perform than rural adults and children. Thus, the urban daily routine of non-wage workers includes a reduced proportion of time devoted to work and cooperative chore performance and an increased amount of time available for a variety of non-work related activities including play, conversation and leisure. Related to the changes in daily activities, urban residence usually alters the availability and amount of time children spend with various family members and changes the role of the extended kin group. For example, the urban mother is often present in and around the home more frequently than the rural mother. The influence and composition of brothers and sisters also usually changes.

Space available to children is far less in the city, and the opportunities to roam and to explore are reduced for young children in the city compared to those in the countryside. Thus, urban children are often in closer proximity during the day to their immediate domestic group and may be less likely to settle disputes and disagreements by leaving the scene. In addition, density and crowding in urban settings puts children in contact with those speaking many different languages, increases opportunities for and the necessity of speaking Kiswahili or English, and certainly increases the potential number and range of people with whom children can interact.

Finally, there is some evidence that long-term urban residence increases certain value and ideological orientations of adults in the direction of a more modern or acculturated pattern of responses. Certainly there is greater range and variety of values and beliefs systems to which children are exposed in the city than in the countryside. To the extent that these changes in ideological orientation and exposure to variety affect behaviour in home or school settings, this characteristic influence of urban settings will produce differences in families and children alike.

The point is not that these particular factors are in any sense the only important variables especially influential for children - many others are relevant. These features do illustrate the methodological and design importance of focusing on clear and delineated aspects of city life for study. Studies of urban-rural differences should specify which of these or other environmental features vary between city and country locations and in turn influence differences in children's behaviour. Specifying such factors will increase the ability to explain and predict the effects of city life, as well as to account for differences between cities within Africa and in other parts of the world.

FAMILY ORGANIZATION AND URBAN RESIDENCE OF CHILDREN

Urban migration to African cities does not result in any one kind of family environment for children. Three kinds of family and domestic group settings seem to predominate in East African cities: urban network families (families with two household units - one in the city and one on a rural homestead); and youths attending urban schools on their own, living apart from their immediate families, often with other relatives or other students. Which kind of family milieu will be associated with urban migration for children depends on a number of factors. These include whether there is a rural homestead or resource base available for the

family; the existence of agricultural opportunity in the rural area; the distance the rural home area is from Nairobi or other urban centres; the type of job and the amount of income earned by the urban wage earner; and the stability and continuity of the job. Depending on various constellations of factors such as these, children living in cities may experience a number of different kinds of family and home environments.

Both parents and all children may live together in urban rooms or apartments and have only occasional or no contacts with the rural area. This nuclear family variant, however, is only one of the number of alternative family arrangements. Another common arrangement is family participation in a rural-urban network. After securing a job, a man's spouse, parents, siblings and some other children will periodically commute to the city from a rural homestead for short or more lengthy stays. The urban wage earner will also visit his rural home. Thus, children attending school in an urban centre who are part of this rural-urban network family pattern often may be living with one parent and will periodically commute back and forth during school vacations. Children frequently change schools in these situations. These children probably will not be living with all of their brothers and sisters and may not be spending all of the school years in the urban setting.

There is no indication that children in the rural-urban network types of family setting are less stable or in a more disruptive or disorganized kind of family environment compared to, for example, children in urban nuclear families. Frequent visiting and a wide between city and country serve to maintain in many respects the socio-cultural system in which the extended family is embedded (Weisner, 1976).

There are also many children who are in Nairobi specifically to attend school, particularly secondary schools and private, post-OGE courses of various kinds. These students live with a variety of relatives and are essentially seeking an education in the city independently of the father's urban occupation, wage earning or other factors which may influence family members to live in town.

Considering just these three kinds of family relationships, educational research interested in correlates between home and family background factors, and school performance will need to examine differences in family influences very closely. A straight-forward census of the urban domestic group in which a student is residing, for example, would be insufficient to understand family influences on school performance. Sampling of the family unit, the domestic group and the history of the child's family involvement will need to include the non-urban segments of the rural-urban network and non-co-resident family members in the case of students in the city primarily for educational purposes. Students in a nuclear family setting will have a very different home experience than will students in a rural-urban network kind of family environment or students who are independent or semi-independent, living apart from their immediate families. These differences include the financial resources available, stability of residence, language use in the home and continuity of school attendance.

EFFECTS OF THE RURAL-URBAN NETWORK FAMILY SYSTEM ON CHILDREN

The most unusual and unique family setting for children which results from urban migration is the rural-urban network family. Illustrate one method of dealing with this kind of environment for children, data were collected on a sample of forty-eight families, twenty-four of which had a male household head living in Nairobi

and twenty-four with the household head living on a rural farm homestead. The rural and urban resident men were matched by age and education to control for the effects of life cycle and occupational and work opportunities. This urban sample of men and families all lived in Karabangi Housing Estate, were all migrants from one Abakwya location (Kisa) and were in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations. The median level of education for men was six years of primary school, and the median income was about 1,350/- per month. The families in this study are fairly comparable to the low-to-middle range of demographic profiles of Nairobi as a whole, but the sample excludes more affluent or better educated heads of families. The sample is characteristic of the non-white, non-city service wage earning family in Nairobi, but is uncharacteristic of the more stable or higher grades of employment, educational levels and incomes in the city.

When the family is structured as a two-household rural-urban network, as these were, the effects on school attendance and rural-urban residence patterns for children are striking. Among the twenty-four families living in the countryside, only three had a child living in an urban centre. Two of these children were attending private secondary schools, and one was living with a brother and attending primary school; and one was living with a four urban families twenty-one had co-resident children under sixteen. Of these twenty-one men, 43 per cent had all of their children living with them in town, 33 per cent had all their children living in the rural home area, separately from the male wage earner and the remaining 24 per cent had some of their children living with them in town and other children living in the rural homestead. This distribution of children's residence is characteristic of the families of men with pre-school or school aged children who are living in town and either working or seeking employment.

There is also considerable mobility experienced by children throughout the year, as shown in Figure 1. Figure 1 compares pre-school children, school aged children who were in fact enrolled in school and children of school age not enrolled in school. During a twelve-month period of continuous fieldwork observation, 48.5 per cent of the pre-school children of urban resident men moved one or more times between city and country locations, 37.5 per cent always lived in town with their father and 14 per cent always lived in the countryside separate from their father. Of those children attending school, half lived continuously in the countryside and attended a rural school, a quarter were permanently resident in and attending school in town and another quarter changed their residence during the school year between the two locations. For those school aged children not attending school, half moved between city and rural homes, 37.5 per cent always lived in the country and only 12.5 per cent were always resident in the city with their father. Thus, for men living in Nairobi, whether employed or seeking employment, 76 per cent had some or all of their children move between town and country. The modal pattern of residence for the children of urban resident men is to commute one or more times between city and country.

Boys and girls were equally likely to attend school and to experience mobility by moving between city and country locations. Pre-school children (between infancy and age six) were more likely to move between city and country than are older children, whether the older children actually attend school or not. One reason for the greater mobility of pre-school children is that they are more likely to move when their mothers move between city and country. Older school age children have less freedom to travel; they have more obligations to perform in the rural area, particularly

agricultural rural and child-care responsibilities in the rural homestead. Furthermore, the costs of maintaining a child in Nairobi are far greater than the costs of maintaining a child in the rural areas, whether the child is in school or not. In addition, many parents believe that urban life is detrimental to children's development and to the acquisition of their first language and deliberately have their children return to the rural areas to attend school. Thus, for the urban families who had children attending school, 65 per cent were attending school in the rural areas, and only 35 per cent were attending school in the cities.

To the extent that these residence patterns, mobility rates and school attendance figures are indicative of general patterns in rural-urban network family styles, the data indicate that one powerful effect of urban migration is to increase the variety of experiences and mobility young children have both within their families and in their schooling, and that pre-school and school age children differ somewhat in the effects of this familial migration pattern.

DIFFERENCES IN COGNITIVE STYLE AND RESPONSIVENESS IN THE CLASSROOM
Data on the rural-urban family system show clear effects on school attendance, mobility and the child's exposure to the city: a more complex and difficult area of urban influence asks about more direct effects on school related cognitive and learning skills. Do children in urban settings where mothers may be present more of the time, for example, or where children experience more diverse language usage, or have fewer siblings around and chores to do, behave differently in standard school or test settings than rural children? The methodological and research design focus involves a consideration of specific urban or rural features likely to affect a relevant school or test behaviours. Work of this kind is still at a very preliminary, tentative stage.

Most of the studies available on this issue have only focused on responses to experimental test situations. In general, urban-reared children appear to be somewhat more likely to use multiple responses to test items and to consider more than one answer to standardized test questions. There is also some indication that urban and acculturated samples give more verbal responses to experimental instructions than rural-reared children. Most findings indicate that the effect of urban residence is to somewhat increase the flexibility that children are likely to show in school and test-type situations and to increase talkativeness in these kinds of settings. These effects have also been found for school versus non-school samples and for children that have had more exposure to western acculturation, as well as for children residing in cities. In fact, schooling and/or acculturation appears to be more influential in producing these effects than city residence per se (Welman, 1975).

Based on these indications from experimental work, it is possible that urban-reared children will respond differently to standard kinds of test situations than will rural children. For example, urban children may be more likely to break contextual sets, may be more likely to verbalize answers and responses to different kinds of answers - that is, vary their responses - more than will rural children. Of course, these possible differences depend entirely on holding constant other important factors, such as the child's language proficiency, his innate ability level and a variety of other conditions which can also influence these kinds of responses. Educational researchers and classroom workers who may observe some of these kinds of differences in urban and rural

Classroom situations will need to consider city and country settings differences as one factor which might account for student performance.

DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL BEHAVIOURS

Social behaviours in the classroom and in the playground may also be influenced by urban-rural differences, although the work in this area is equally or more preliminary than is the test data. There is some evidence, however, that in the urban setting children between the ages of two to eleven seem to display certain characteristic social-behavioural differences compared to similar age and sex children living on rural homesteads. Children from the same sample described for the rural-urban network family were systematically observed in their daily activities in the home setting in both city and country locations. The method of direct, naturalistic observation was combined with interviews and visits with families in the rural-urban network system. Hence, the design focused on children in well described and watched home settings in both locations, studied contemporaneously.

Three behavioural domains which have been empirically tested using these techniques show differences in compliance, pro-social responsibility and information-seeking (Welman, 1974). Children living in urban settings tend to verbally seek information from others more often and to receive verbal responses and information from others more often, particularly from mothers. In addition, rural children display more independent social responsibility, the urban children tend to display more disruptive behaviours and to reduce their cooperative activity in the city.

These findings are consistent with work done by Munroe and Munroe (1972; 1975) which report that some African children given a direct prescriptive command complied with the command for a longer period of time and more diligently than did a comparison sample of American children. To the extent that some of the same social-situational factors which presumably influence the urban American sample occur in an urban African setting, similar differences in compliance may occur. Nancy Graves (1972) has also reported that urban women in Buganda report a lowered sense of control in child care than rural mothers. The mothers' feelings and attitudes in this regard may be a realistic appraisal of their own role relative to the effects of the urban family and daily routines on children's behaviours. Urban children who are more talkative and exploratory in test situations in Africa may be partly influenced in this response by their home and family settings.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Urban migration produces at least three important kinds of family and domestic group milieux around urban children, including the co-resident nuclear family, the rural-urban extended family network, as well as children living with a variety of kin while in the cities specifically to attend school. Urban social settings do appear to have some independent influence on children's behaviours which may be related to possible school performance outcomes. These differences include increased variety and diversity of responsiveness to test and experimental situations and increased verbalizations in such situations. There is also some preliminary evidence indicating that urban children make and receive more verbal requests for information than do rural children, that they are somewhat less cooperative and compliant in responding to requests, and that offering help and assistance to others declines. It is possible that all of these kinds of differences may have implications for school performance and for education.

although this remains to be explored. However, these rural-urban differences must be seen in the context of other powerful influences on children's behaviours, including age, sex, innate abilities, birth order and other factors.

In planning studies on differences between urban and rural settings that influence schooling, the research design and method should specify what it is about the particular situation which affects children in city and country settings, family personnel available, density and crowding, tasks and daily routines and value changes are examples of such specific factors.

Finally, urban-rural comparisons will benefit by using contemporaneous samples of rural and urban children, families, or schools. Selecting some urban children and comparing them to some prior research study done in a rural community, for example, has many dangers, the greatest of which is that the rural setting is changing rapidly; the two locations, far from being isolated from each other, are mutually interdependent. The many children currently commuting between city and country are an expression of this rural-urban interrelationship.

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RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY BETWEEN CITY AND COUNTRY OF CHILDREN OF URBAN MIGRANTS

FIGURE 1

