

Internal Migration, Socio-Economic Status and Remittances: Experiences of Migrant Adolescent Girls' Head-Porters in Ghana

Kennedy A. Alatinga (Ph.D)
University for Development Studies
Faculty of Planning and Land Management
Department of Community Development
Wa Campus, Ghana
Email: kalatinga@gmail.com

Mobile: +233205649944

In Ghana, high levels of poverty compel people to migrate from the three northern regions (Upper West, Upper East and Northern Regions) to the two largest urban cities Accra—the national capital, and also the capital of the Greater Accra Region and Kumasi—the capital of the Ashanti Region in search of jobs and other economic opportunities (Osei-Boateng, 2012). These three northern regions also have the highest incidence of poverty in Ghana. The latest Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS7) reports that poverty in the three Northern regions worsened— from 70.7% in 2012/13 to 70.9% in 2016/17, in the Upper West Region, from 44.4% in 2012/13 to 54.8% in 2016/17 in the Upper East Region, and from 50.4% in 2012/13 to 61.1% in 2016/17 in the Northern Region respectively (Ghana Statistical Service, 2018). During the same period, the poverty situation improved in the Ashanti and Accra Regions— poverty declined from 14.8% in 2012/2013 to 11.6% in 2016/17 in the Ashanti Region, and from 5.6% in 2012/13 to 2.5% in the Greater Accra Region, compared to the national average of 23.4%.

Migration trends in Ghana in recent times reveal the movement of predominantly adolescent girls aged 10-19 years largely from the poorer northern regions of Ghana to the richer urban markets of Accra and Kumasi with the aim of improving their socio-economic status (SES) (Awumbila & Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2008; Tufeyiru, 2014). In the cities of Accra and Kumasi, most of these adolescent girls engage in head-load carrying (*kayayoo*) business. The *kayayoo* “business” is the situation in which adolescent girls literally use themselves as human transport by carrying loads of goods on their heads for unregulated fees to save money for later investment and remitting to their families back home (Agarwal et al., 1997; Tufeyiru, 2014). Thus migration becomes a conduit for the adolescent girls to aspire to change the poor SES of their families for the better.

However, there is currently little evidence on whether these adolescent girls' aspirations for migrating are met. For example, the adolescent girls' ability to remit, the extent to which the *Kayayoo* business improves the adolescents girls' SES, financial situation, and their overall poverty situation and that of their families is unknown. From a capabilities perspective, the extent to which the *Kayayoo* business increases the capacity of the adolescent girls to be more secure and live the lives they have reason to value is not also known. In terms of income potential, head-porters are reported to have low levels of earnings. For example, Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf (2008, p.177) and Oberhauser (2011, p.22) found that female head-porters are among the poorest of urban dwellers in

Accra, with an estimated average daily earnings ranging from US\$ 1.20 to US\$ 2.20 and US\$ 3.20 to US\$ 5.20 on a good day. This paper draws on aspirations and capabilities conceptual and theoretical framework to illuminate our understanding of the subject matter comprehensively. The study deployed an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design involving 503 individual surveys and 24 in-depth interviews in both Accra and Kumasi. The individuals for the surveys were randomly using time location sampling while the individuals for the in-depth interviews were purposely selected.

The study results revealed that that 61% of adolescents migrated from the north to the south to escape poverty while 29% migrated to work and raise money for school fees. Four Percent migrated to escapes from outmoded cultural practices such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), and another six percent migrated due to wandelust and peer influence. Further a logistic regression model as shown in Table demonstrate that older adolescents 15-19years (AOR=7.32, $p<0.05$, CI=[1.999-26.802] number of year spent working as head-porter, 3-years (AOR=3.97, $p<0.05$, CI= [1.633-9.677] and SES—not poor (AOR=8.63, $p<0.001$, CI=[4.761-8.435]) significantly influenced remittances.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Model of Remittances by Adolescent Girls Head-Porters in Ghana

<i>Variables</i>	Unadjusted OR (95% CI)	Adjusted OR (95% CI)
Age group		
10-14 (Reference)		
15-19	6.870(2.076- 22.733)**	7.319(1.999-26.802)*
Marital status		
Married (Reference)		
Never Married	0.980(0.592-1.623)	2.150(1.097-4.211)*
Divorced	1.785(0.107-29.665)	2.473(0.077-79.501)
Ethnic group		
Dagomba (Reference)		
Mamprusis	1.262(0.846-1.881)	1.664(0.991-2.794)
Walla	2.028(0.685-6.005)	1.400(0.403-4.857)
Gonja	1.014(0.466-2.207)	1.057(0.419-2.666)
Others	1.465(0.680- 3.157)	1.598(0.625-4.089)
Education		
None (Reference)		
Primary	0.795(0.499-1.268)	0.8201(0.471-1.430)
JSS/JHS	0.384(0.242-0.611)***	0.425(0.240-0.752)**
Secondary/Technical	0.288(0.126-0.659)**	0.230(0.088-0.599)**
Religion		
Islam (Reference)		
Christian	1.014(0.486- 2.114)	0.765(0.310-1.884)
Traditional/Other	1.479(0.444- 4.920)	2.126(0.492-9.185)
City of Migration		
Accra (Reference)		

Kumasi	0.733(0.509-1.057)		1.028(0.634-1.666)
Number years working as a Head-Porter			
<1year (Reference)			
1year	1.369(0.829-2.260)		0.996(0.550-1.804)
2years	2.879(1.592-5.207)***		2.289(1.132-4.626)*
3years	3.102(1.532-6.279)**		3.976(1.633-9.677)*
4years & Above	3.246(1.509-6.980)**		3.202(1.216-8.435)*
Socio-Economic Status (SES)			
Poor(Reference)			
Not Poor	9.41(5.456-16.231)***		8.627(4.761-15.632)***

Source: Author's fieldwork 2019

The results in Table 1 suggest that girls will have to temporarily or permanently stay out of school to enable them raise money. But the adolescent girls who will become future women leaders have to abandon the classroom to carry heavy loads of goods in the urban markets to support their families, in some cases, to support their brothers' education. Adolescent girls staying out of school opens up spaces for social and political inequalities between women and men and produces entrenched disadvantages, including poverty for women (Kabeer, 2015). In addition, the physical nature of their work affects the health of the adolescent girls resulting in very high health expenditure as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Average Monthly Expenditure of Adolescent Girls

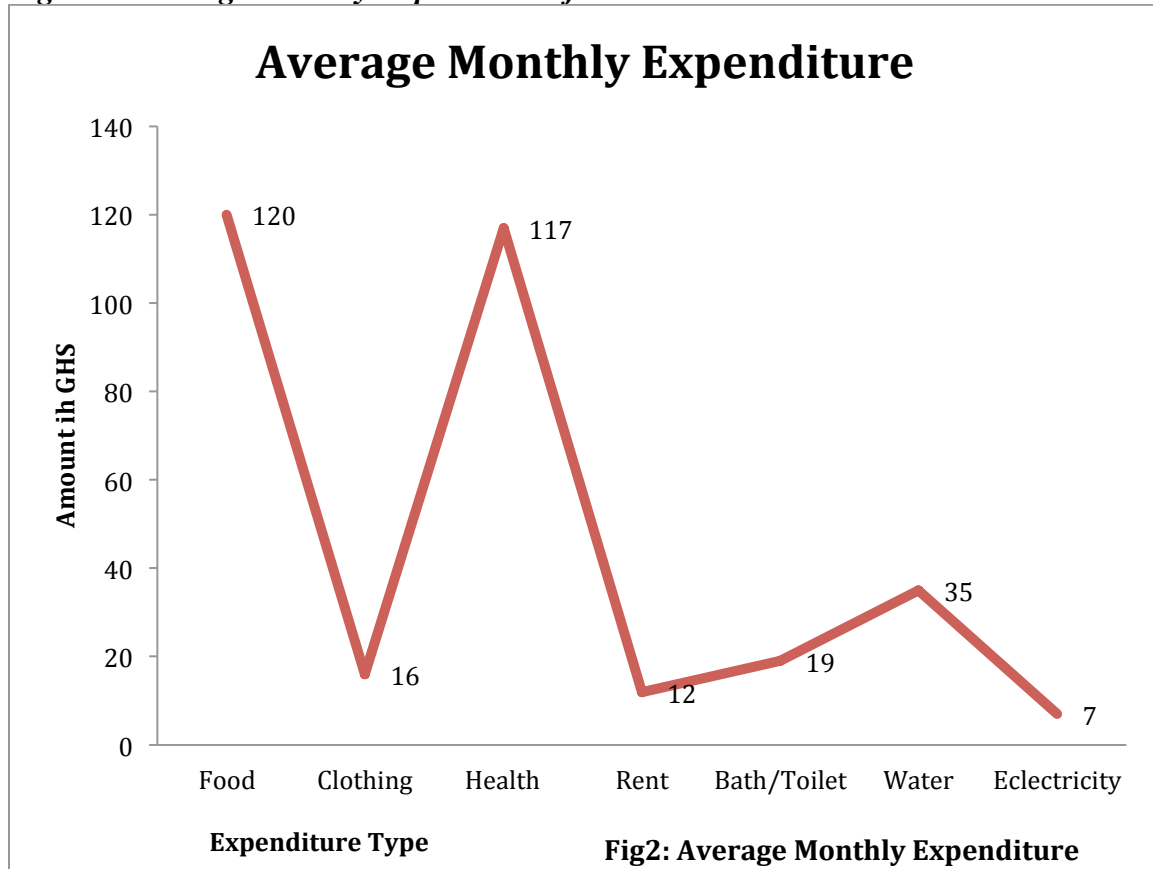


Fig2: Average Monthly Expenditure

Source: Author's fieldwork 2019

The results revealed that 30% of the adolescents' earnings are spent on health care. This huge health expenditure is catastrophic—health expenditure that exceeds or equals 30%-40% of household income could further push both the adolescent and their families into extreme poverty

Essentially, the kayayoo business had capacitated only thirty-six percent of the adolescent girls to remit various sums of money ranging from less than GHS 100 to over GHS 300 (\$18.5-55.55) annually. These remittances capacitated recipient families to invest in human capital development and also improved household food security. These positives, however, appear to cancel out because majority (64%) of the adolescents are unable to remit. The narrative from one respondents below confirms this claim:

“I and my family are now poorer than before. My father borrowed money GHS 300 for me to come to Accra because we thought I could raise enough money to pay that money. But for the past two years I have been here, I have been struggling to raise that money. The little money I get sometimes GHS 8 in a day, I have to spend GHS 1.50 on food, GHS 1 to bath, GHS .50 for toilet, pay for accommodation and light bill. And the person who gave the money to my father is putting pressure on him” (14-year adolescent, Madina Market, Accra).

The results largely demonstrate that the kayayoo business does not seem to capacitate the adolescent girls to live the kind of life they have reason to value because only 36% of them remitted to their families. Based on these results two broad strands of recommendations are proffered. In the short-term, adolescents working as head-porters to raise money for school must be identified and enrolled in school through the Free Senior High School Policy, while the establishment of factories and industries in Northern Ghana to create employment opportunities could be a long-term measure.