

Leaving Home: Timing and Consequences for Young People in the Slums of Nairobi

Thaddeus Egondi¹, Donatien Beguy¹, Caroline W. Kabiru¹, Kanyiva Muindi¹, Chi-Chi Undie²

¹African Population and Health Research Center, Nairobi, Kenya

²Population Council, Nairobi, Kenya

Introduction

The act of leaving parental home is considered an important marker of the transition to adulthood. Because independence is seen as the hallmark of adulthood, establishing a residence that is independent from one's parental home has been the focus of much research attention (e.g.: Goldscheider, 1993; Koc, 2000; Mulder, Clark, & Wagner 2002). Becoming resident independent is noted as being indexical of economic and individual autonomy from the household of origin and, indeed, as being a focal point for other critical development tasks and transitions (Bendit, 1999). Leaving home is also an important event because of its interdependencies and consequences (Aassve, Billari & Ongaro, 2000). Most studies on the dynamics of residential independence have been conducted among populations in the global north. Thus, little is known about this phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa. In response to this knowledge gap, this paper explores the issue of residential independence among young people aged 12 to 22 years in two informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. Specifically, we explore the timing of leaving parental home for young people in these two slums. Residential independence often moves young people away from parental monitoring and other forms of social controls thus predisposing them to risk behaviors. Thus, we also investigate the association between independent living and risky sexual behavior.

Method

Study setting

Nairobi's informal settlements (or 'slums') provide an interesting context for examining residential independence. The realities of the dire economic challenges in the slums create a situation in which leaving home may be realized through unique living arrangements. For instance, in a context characterized by overcrowding, adolescents in the slums may be prompted to establish a separate residence from that of their parents simply because sufficient space in their household of origin. In such situations, some youth may have 'left home' in that they live in, and are responsible for paying for, their own independent residence, but they continue to be supported in other ways (e.g., the costs feeding, education) by their household of origin.

Data

The data used in this study are drawn from the baseline survey (October 2007-June 2008) of the Transition-To-Adulthood (TTA) project, a component of the 5-year Urbanization, Poverty and Health Dynamics (UPHD) project conducted in two Nairobi slums in Kenya. During the baseline survey, about 4,058 (75% response rate) youth were interviewed

using a structured, interviewer-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions covering socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. independent housing and schooling), reproductive aspirations (e.g. parenthood, marriage); key health and other concerns (e.g. worry about HIV/AIDS, getting a job, marriage, finishing school, employment); living arrangements and nature of interactions with parents, guardians, teachers, and peers; involvement in youth groups (including religious and social groups); involvement in risky behaviors, for example early sexual debut, multiple sexual partnerships, non-use of condoms, smoking, delinquency and alcohol consumption. The questionnaire was translated from English to Swahili and administered in Swahili, the language most spoken in the study area.

Statistical analyses

Cox proportional hazards model is used to analyze the timing of first move to independent housing. The Cox model is used because not all of the adolescents had moved out of their parents' home/house at the time of interview and the method is capable of handling these censored cases (i.e., individuals who have not yet owned or rented house). Logistic regression is used in the analysis of the consequences of independent living.

Results

Table 2 below shows the hazard ratios for time to leaving the parental home for combined sexes and each sex separately. Results from the multivariate analyses show that females were more likely than males to delay home leaving. Surprisingly, young people who were out of school were also more likely than those in school to delay home leaving. Involvement in an income generating activity increased the likelihood of early residential independence for both sexes combined and for females; however, the association was not significant for males. Religiosity, self-esteem, and engaging in delinquent behavior were not associated with the timing of residential independence. Experience of some of the events marking transitions to adulthood yielded mixed results. In the combined group (both males and females) and among females, marriage prior to residential independence was with an earlier transition to residential independence. However, females who had a pregnancy before moving were more likely to move out later than those who had not had a pregnancy. The traditional expectation for certain ethnic groups (the Kikuyu, for instance) is that boys will live on their own once they have undergone circumcision (a rite that symbolizes the transition to adulthood for some sub-cultures in Kenya and that is performed on boys from around the age of 13). Compared to youth from the Kikuyu ethnic group, adolescents from all other ethnic groups were more likely to transition into independent housing later; however, with the exception of Luos, this association was not significant among females.

Table 2: Hazard ratios for determinants of timing of leaving the parental home

	Overall		Males		Female	
	<i>Haz. Ratio</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Haz. Ratio</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Haz. Ratio</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Female (<i>ref: Male</i>)	0.62	0.000	-	-	-	-
Dropped out of school (<i>ref: in school</i>)	0.45	0.000	0.42	0.000	0.51	0.000
Involved in IGA (<i>ref: not in IGA</i>)	1.19	0.018	1.15	0.116	1.53	0.001
Religiosity score	1.04	0.175	1.06	0.132	0.99	0.878
Civil participation score	1.00	0.965	0.93	0.423	1.17	0.275
Low self esteem score	1.07	0.202	1.05	0.443	1.13	0.177
Peer pressure score	1.05	0.323	1.02	0.711	1.15	0.082
Delinquency score	1.05	0.297	1.05	0.383	1.10	0.432
Married before independent housing	1.42	0.001	0.88	0.499	1.94	0.000
Pregnancy before independent housing	0.67	0.001	0.29	0.000	1.01	0.918
Ethnicity (<i>ref: kikuyu</i>)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Luhya	0.75	0.008	0.69	0.006	0.88	0.474
Luo	0.70	0.001	0.73	0.017	0.66	0.025
Kamba	0.81	0.020	0.76	0.014	0.87	0.337
Other	0.68	0.000	0.57	0.000	0.88	0.421

A multivariate model for multiple sexual partners (used as an indicator of risky sexual behaviour) in the year preceding the interview was fitted. The model was fitted to assess whether having independent housing which was the key independent variable, had an impact on risky behaviour. The results show that those who had independent housing were significantly twice as likely to report more than one sexual partner in the year before the interview as those who were not independent. Other factors predicting number of partners include parental monitoring which is protective of adolescents while those reporting to be delinquents were more likely to report more than one sexual partners.

Conclusion

Leaving home is an important event because of its interdependencies with other markers of the transition to adulthood and its consequences. We find an association between independent living and risk behavior as measured by number of sexual partners.

References

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