



The role of productive activities in the lives of adolescents: Photovoice evidence from Malawi

Susannah Zietz^{a,*}, Jacobus de Hoop^b, Sudhanshu Handa^c

^a Department of Health Behavior, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, United States

^b UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, Italy

^c Carolina Population Center, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, United States



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Adolescence
Cash transfer
Child labor
Malawi
Photovoice

ABSTRACT

Adolescence is an important transitional period, separate from both childhood and adulthood. Critical physical and mental development occurs during adolescence, including emotional skills, physical, and mental abilities. Behaviors adopted during this lifecourse period have critical implications for adolescents' future health and well-being. The main research question of the present study is: what is the role of productive activities in the lives and development of adolescents in rural Malawi? As part of this study, selected adolescents from poor rural households were asked to take photographs of their daily (productive) activities. These photographs served as a starting point for focus group discussions. In addition to including adolescents, we conducted qualitative interviews with caregivers and teachers to triangulate and obtain a more holistic understanding of adolescent engagement in productive activities. The main themes that emerged were that 1) the work that is conducted by adolescent boys and girls inside and outside the household is not only perceived by adolescents as a product of poverty, but as a point of pride, as well as a potential means of providing for one's future, 2) there is a tension between the needs of the family and schooling, and 3) adolescent productive activities are associated with minor although not negligible hazards and injuries. We discuss that these qualitative findings help to better understand how social protection interventions, such as Malawi's Social Cash Transfer Program, may affect adolescent engagement in work and adolescent wellbeing more generally.

1. Introduction

Adolescence is an important transitional period, separate from both childhood and adulthood. Critical physical and mental development occurs during adolescence, including emotional skills, physical, and mental abilities. Behaviors adopted during this lifecourse period have critical implications for adolescents' future health and well-being (Mmari et al., 2014). Additionally, in adolescence, gender norms are “solidified, rejected, or transformed” (UNICEF, 2016). According to UNICEF, “evidence shows that when adolescent girls and boys are supported and encouraged by caring adults, along with policies and services attentive to their needs and capabilities, they have the potential to break long-standing cycles of poverty, discrimination, and violence” (UNICEF, 2016).

Work carried out by adolescents in and outside the household can have significant effects on education and health outcomes and hence on adolescents' transition to adulthood. There is an extensive literature on the tradeoff between children's and adolescents' labor and schooling, including reduced school attendance, worse school performance, and

increased chance of grade repetition among those who work (Assaad, Levison, & Zibani, 2010; Beegle, Dehejia, & Gatti, 2009). Additionally, global studies have found that child labor significantly increases the probability of illness (Beegle et al., 2009; O'Donnell, Rosati, & Van Doorslaer, 2005).

The present study provides a nuanced qualitative picture of the role of work in the lives of adolescents in rural Malawi. Adolescents in Malawi commonly support their households both by caring for other household members and engaging in income generating activities. According to representative 2013/2014 UNICEF MICS data, about 70% of adolescent minors engage in economic activities (National Statistical Office of Malawi, 2015). Secondary school enrollment rates and school attendance rates of adolescents are low. In 2012, the largest single reason given for dropout in primary or secondary education was “family responsibility” according to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (2012), including dropping out due to a need to take care of family members and/or help provide for the family.

The study complements experimental quantitative analysis examining the effect of one of the government of Malawi's most important

* Corresponding author at: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 135 Dauer Drive, 302 Rosenau Hall, CV #7440, Chapel Hill, NC 27599, United States.
E-mail address: zietz@live.unc.edu (S. Zietz).

social protection programs, the Social Cash Transfer Program (SCTP) locally known as *Mtukula Pakhomo*, on adolescent's participation in work (De Hoop, Groppo, & Handa, 2017). The SCTP currently provides regular income transfers to over 170,000 ultra-poor, “labor-constrained” households.¹ Social cash transfer programs such as the SCTP have been shown to improve vulnerable adolescents' transition from adolescence to adulthood. In settings of severe poverty, unconditional cash transfer programs have been shown to increase the school participation of adolescents (Baird, McIntosh, & Özler, 2011; Handa, Natali, Seidenfeld, & Tembo, 2016). These programs also improve adolescents' mental health (Baird, de Hoop, & Özler, 2013; Kilburn, Thirumurthy, Halpern, Pettifor, & Handa, 2016), delay their sexual debut, pregnancy, and marriage (Baird et al., 2011; Handa, Halpern, Pettifor, & Thirumurthy, 2014; Handa et al., 2017, 2015), and reduce both engagement in risky sexual behavior (Cluver et al., 2013) and the probability of contracting sexually transmitted disease (Baird, Garfein, McIntosh, & Özler, 2012).

Following the suggestion of Orkin (2011), this paper provides a “holistic view” of adolescents' experiences of work to inform policy making. We provide a broad overview of productive activities in the lives of adolescents and briefly reflect on the effect of the SCTP on these activities towards the end of the paper. Our approach answers a call in recent years, particularly from scholars in Sociology, Anthropology, and Political Science, for child and adolescents-focused economic research that recognizes “children as actors in their own rights, constrained by societies' constructions of appropriate spaces and activities for childhood but mediating the impacts of social boundaries by their choices and behavior” (Levinson, 2000, p. 125).

A key feature of this qualitative study is the use of a photo-elicitation approach informed by the photovoice methodology to facilitate the elicitation and inclusion of adolescents' perspectives. Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) is a participatory action research method based on health promotion principles and the theoretical literature on education for critical consciousness, feminist theory, and a community-based approach to documentary photography (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, Burris, & Ping, 1996). As part of the photo-elicitation approach, selected adolescents were asked to take photographs of their daily activities, especially productive activities, and to reflect on these activities based on the photographs in a focus group discussion. Our approach was informed by the photovoice methodology because it “positions [adolescents] at the centre around which key research questions, descriptions, interpretations and analyses are made” (Crivello, Camfield, & Woodhead, 2009, p. 52) and actively engages adolescents in the process of developing and implementing the research.

In addition to including adolescents, we also conducted qualitative interviews with caregivers and teachers to triangulate and obtain a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon of adolescents' labor and how it was perceived to be impacted by the SCTP. The qualitative data helps to address the recommendations of a recent study by Krauss (2017), which emphasized the importance of combining quantitative with qualitative methods to identify a broader range of potential factors for why children work (p. 1).

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 gives a general background on adolescent work globally and in Malawi, Malawi's SCTP program, the quantitative impact evaluation examining the effects of this program on adolescent labor, and Photovoice. Section 3 describes the methodology of the study. Section 4 describes the main qualitative findings complemented with information from the caregiver and teacher interviews. Section 5 reflects on the role of the SCTP and concludes.

2. Background

2.1. Adolescent work globally and in Malawi

In 2016, approximately 14% of all children aged 5 to 17 globally were estimated to be engaged in economic activities (ILO, 2017). Child engagement in economic activities is markedly more common in Africa (20%) than in other regions. And the lions' share of children engaged in economic activities (over 70%) works in agriculture, especially on household owned farms. Boys are more likely to engage in economic activities than girls, while girls engage more intensively in household chores. Adolescents (aged 15 to 17) are particularly likely to engage in economic activities (25%).

The National Statistical Office of Malawi (2015) provides nationally representative information on adolescents' (aged 15 to 17) engagement in economic activities and household chores. Over 70% of adolescents engage in economic activities. Boys are slightly more likely to engage in economic activities than girls (73 v. 68%) and adolescents in rural areas are markedly more likely to engage in economic activities than their counterparts in urban areas (77 v. 37%). Most girls and boys (over 90%) engage in household chores. Following standard procedures, National Statistical Office of Malawi (2015) classifies about 59% of adolescents in Malawi as engaged in potentially harmful child labor (including engagement in long hours of work and exposure to hazards).

According to the 2017 Global Education Monitoring Report, 50% of adolescents in Malawi who should have been in Lower secondary school were out-of-school, and the upper secondary adjusted net enrollment rate was only 41% (44% for males, and 38% for females). The secondary school net attendance rate is much lower in rural areas than in urban areas (Malawi 2015–16 DHS, 2017). As mentioned in the introduction, reliance on adolescents to provide for their household and care for household members is presumed to play a role in these schooling outcomes (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2012).

2.2. Malawi's Social Cash Transfer Program

Malawi's SCTP is a large-scale social protection program that aims to “reduce poverty and hunger and increase school enrollment rates” in “ultra-poor, labor-constrained households” (Malawi SCTP Evaluation Team, 2016).² Beneficiary households are identified in two steps, the first consisting of a community-based shortlisting process and the second of a proxy-means test to confirm that shortlisted households are indeed “ultra-poor”. Transfer amounts increase with the total number of household members and the number of school-aged household members and are equivalent to about 20% of average beneficiary household income. The program currently reaches over 170,000 households in 18 of Malawi's 28 districts.

2.3. Impact evaluation

Several quantitative studies document the effects of unconditional cash transfer programs, such as Malawi's SCTP, on child and adolescent work (see also De Hoop & Rosati, 2014).³ Most of these studies find that such programs lower participation in economic activities and household chores (Covarrubias, Davis, & Winters, 2012; Edmonds, 2006;

¹ Households are classified as labor-constrained if they have a ratio of at least three individuals who are unfit to work against each individual who is fit to work.

² From 2007 to 2012, the main funder of the program was the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund). Later on, the program was supported by other funders, among which the Government of Malawi, the German Government, Irish Aid and the European Union (EU). The program is administered by Malawi's Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW), with additional policy oversight provided by the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (MoFEPD) and technical support from UNICEF Malawi.

³ There is also an extensive literature documenting the effects of cash transfer programs with schooling conditions. See, for instance, De Hoop and Rosati (2014) and Fiszbein and Schady (2009).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6833404>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6833404>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)