

# **Migration Projects: Children on the Move for Work and Education**

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Child migration is a relatively new area in academic and policy debates (although in practice this is not a new phenomena). At the beginning of the twenty-first century there was very limited literature available but over the past five years or so this is beginning to change, partly as a result of research programmes such as those being carried out by the Development and Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty and the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

The majority of literature on migration has focused on adults and rarely have migrant children's own perspectives been heard. Consequently, inadequate assumptions have been made about child migrants' lives. For example, it has been assumed that children migrate because they are forced to: coerced by their parents or trafficked by others, and solely because of economic reasons. They are often portrayed as passive victims of exploitation, lacking agency and not having an active role in the decision-making or migration process (Hashim 2006). Farrow (2007) argues that this is because children have tended to be viewed as migrating only as dependents rather than as independent migrants.

Whitehead and Hashim (2005: 24) note that there has been a particular focus on: 'Trafficked children, street children, AIDS orphans, child soldiers and child refugees' but ordinary child migrants' stories have been hidden. Independent child migrants were invisible if they did not fall into one of these vulnerable categories. As a result of this focus on more harmful situations, children's migration experiences have usually been assumed to be negative: suffering poor working conditions, very low (or even no) pay; and an absence of education. Such generalisations have disguised the reality of many migrant children's lives.

The important point to note here is that migration of children and young people is not new. It is new in terms of the literature as children have largely been ignored in migration studies until recently and, as we have seen, when they had been discussed it was only the worst forms of child migration that were considered. This also parallels development literature in general where children have been largely invisible until relatively recently. Since the 1990s children have begun to be more considered in relation to their active contribution to development, but again the initial focus was on children in exceptionally difficult circumstances or especially disadvantaged children, such as child prostitutes, child soldiers, street children, child labourers and child

slaves. This has contributed to an over-emphasis on popular conceptualisations of the exploited nature of childhoods in the majority world<sup>1</sup>. Recently some studies have explored ordinary children's everyday lives in the majority world in a variety of contexts such as rural Uganda (Bell 2007), rural Bolivia (Punch 2003) and suburban South Africa (Benwell Forthcoming).

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of some of the key issues in the migrant lives of ordinary children in the majority world in order to contribute to migration debates by recognising that some children choose to migrate for work and/or education. The paper also aims to highlight gaps in the relevant literature and point to directions for further research. Recent studies have highlighted that the lack of research with independent child migrants has led to simplistic and inadequate assumptions about their lives. Children being forced to migrate and working in exploitative conditions may be the case for some young migrants, but for many it is not. For example, Hauge Riisøen et al. point out that in their studies in Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mali “trafficking still represents a relatively limited practice when considering the extensive relocation of children taking place in the region” (2004: 54). Thus, this paper explores the complexity and diversity of children’s migration motives and experiences, first in relation to work and second in relation to education. It begins by discussing the multiple reasons for the migration of children, and subsequently their positive and negative experiences. It draws mainly on the emerging literature in this field as well as on my own research with young migrants who leave southern rural Bolivia to work in a nearby town and in neighbouring Argentina (Punch 2002; 2007a)<sup>2</sup>. Most of the child migrants discussed in this paper are older children in the 13-18 age range (also referred to here as ‘young people’), as there is a paucity of literature which considers the much smaller group of migrants who are under 13 years of age.

## **MIGRATING FOR WORK: REASONS**

Recent research has indicated that there are multiple reasons why children migrate for work. One of the key underlying factors is poverty but the motives are often not purely economic as there are many other social and cultural reasons why children seek migrant work. At the macro level there are a range of crises which may lead to children’s migration, such as political conflict (Boyden and de Berry 2004), economic crises, HIV/AIDS (Ansell and van Blerk 2004) and environmental disasters (Lynch 2005). Global economic restructuring and uneven development has led to increased levels of migration as young people leave impoverished rural areas in search of employment and better lifestyles (Bryceson 2004; Taracena 2003). For some communities out-migration is a relatively new phenomena (Carpena-Mendez 2007; Swanson Forthcoming 2007) but for others there may already be a long history of migration (Ansell 2000; Hashim 2006). For example, favourable exchange rates in particular can encourage international migration particularly across borders such as Mexico to the US (Carpena-Mendez 2007; Hellman Forthcoming 2007) or Bolivia to Argentina (Bastia 2005; Punch 2007a).

Development, or the lack of it, also shapes migration flows. For example, in parts of Eastern and Southern Africa urban labour markets are overcrowded and new migrants can be unable to find work, which has resulted in some migrants moving back to rural

areas (Francis 2000). Swanson (Forthcoming 2007) describes how a new road built in 1992 has opened up migrant work opportunities for women and children in Calhuasí, Ecuador. In my research in Bolivia, rural development projects (including improved roads, more efficient irrigation systems, flood protection and a new hospital) has led to an increase in land prices, making it extremely difficult for return migrants to compete with outsiders who wish to buy land for commercial purposes. Thus processes of development can impact on levels of both out-migration and return migration.

Many independent child migrants are economic migrants in search of work (Bastia 2005; Yaqub 2007a). For children and young people in rural subsistence communities migration may be necessary if they have no access to land, which is often the case unless their parents lend them land or they have inherited land. Their work opportunities may be very limited, particularly during the dry season if there is a lack of irrigation systems. Lack of available land can become increasingly problematic as family plots are divided up for the next generation resulting in insufficient land for each child to inherit (Punch 2002; 2007; Swanson Forthcoming 2007).

At the micro level of the household, some children end up migrating as a result of domestic violence or abuse (Hauge Riisøen et al. 2004; Iversen 2002), or personal crisis and gender-based discrimination (Bastia 2005). At the community level, Whitehead and Hashim (2005: 25) point out that in areas where there are high rates of adult migration, there can also be high rates of child migration (see also Farrow 2007). This is particularly the case in communities that have a 'culture of migration', where young people may feel left out if they have never migrated (Bey 2003; Punch 2007a). If there is long history of migration from that area, then migration may be the norm and may be encouraged by return migrants and by parents who see it as an opportunity for their children. Camacho explains that:

The family does not only transmit work-related values, it also transmits migration-related values to its members. ... The cultural context of the community likewise may socialize children towards work-related migration. (Camacho 1999: 68).

Hashim (2006) argues that there are two key benefits for migrants from areas with a long history of migration. Firstly, there are wider social networks as extended families become dispersed and secondly, there is a greater knowledge of alternative labour markets. Both of these mean that the likelihood of getting work is increased and the decision to migrate may be easier compared with those who live in areas that do not have a culture of migration. Thus the availability of social networks influence a child's decision to migrate. If they know they are likely to get work in their migrant destination, can travel with others and stay with others on arrival then this is likely to increase their likelihood of deciding to leave. Camacho (1999) indicates that having family-based contacts at the place of destination could facilitate children's decision to seek employment as domestic workers in the Philippines.

For many young people migration is strongly linked to their stage in the lifecourse as it becomes important for their transition from childhood to adulthood (Carpena-Mendez 2007; Punch 2002). Migration is like a 'rite of passage' which many young people feel a need to experience on their pathway to a more economically and socially

independent lifestyle. Both parents and children in Thorsen's study spoke about 'being awake' after having lived in a town or city, referring to becoming mature, responsible and more autonomous (Thorsen 2005). For children in Hashim's research they cited that 'their interest in new life-experiences' (2006) was a reason for leaving and girls migrated to 'have their eyes opened' (Hashim 2005: 33). Curiosity to 'see what it's like' and not be left behind (Bey 2003) should not be underestimated as an important motive for encouraging children to migrate.

Similarly, linked to the notion of a 'rite of passage' and youth transitions, becoming economically independent is a key reason why children seek migrant work in order to be able to consume more widely and access global goods as well as saving for the future (Hashim 2006; Punch 2007a). Whitehead and Hashim (2005: 28) argued that a central motivation for migration is children's 'need or desire for income'. Thorsen (2005) found that children in her study in Burkina Faso used their income to buy clothes and possibly a bicycle if they could earn enough.

Children's motives for migration often include meeting their individual needs and their obligations of contributing to the household. Elsewhere I refer to this as 'negotiated interdependence' (Punch 2002), a term:

... which reflects how young people in the majority world are constrained by various structures and cultural expectations of family responsibilities yet also have the ability to act within and between such constraints, balancing household and individual needs. (Punch 2002: 132)

Similarly Hashim (2006: 26) found that children in her study in Ghana saw themselves "as economic agents with a responsibility to contribute to their households and their individual livelihoods" and Camacho argues that "family and personal goals are interwoven" (2007: 64) for the children in her study in the Philippines.

Migration also enables young people to actively participate in constructing new opportunities for their future (Jeffrey and McDowell 2004; Punch 2007a). For example, it opens up possibilities of them staying at the migrant destination, moving on to another place of migrant work or returning back home to their community of origin. Thus migration can lead to broadening their future opportunities and opening up new choices, albeit limited ones. Finally another reason why children may migrate in search of work, is because there may be a lack of education opportunities at home which may lead to them seeking work instead (discussed in more detail later).

### **Decision-making process**

Like all aspects of the migration, the decision-making process around whether children should migrate or not, is extremely diverse and complex. Parents and children may influence the decision to varying degrees. Siblings can also have an important role in this process (Camacho 1999; Punch 2002), and in particular birth order can be crucial in determining when a young person migrates (Punch 2001). Sometimes both children and parents may be quite ambivalent about whether the young person should stay or go. It is often not a clear-cut decision that is made easily. Return migrants inspiring others to leave should not be underestimated as an influential factor in the decision-making process (Beauchemin 1999; Castle and

Diarra 2003; Punch 2007a). For example, Hauge Riisøen et al. suggest that “The aspect of curiosity and peer pressure may tempt children from well off and stable households to leave home in search of adventure” (2004: 52).

The important point is that children are not just passive pawns but often actively seek migration opportunities themselves. For example, in Bourdillon’s study (2007) of child domestic workers in Zimbabwe, two thirds of the children said they chose to seek employment and some older children took it for granted that they should be working (72 per cent of the sample were aged 15-18, and 28 per cent were under 15). In Camacho’s research (1999) with child domestic workers in the Philippines 80 per cent of the children said it was their personal decision to work.

Therefore, sometimes parents are instigators or actively encourage their children’s migration, other times they resist it and try to postpone it, or some may be actively against it and children leave without their consent (see Iversen 2006). For example, in Bolivia some parents were keen for their children to migrate later when they were a few years older, partly because they needed more help on the land with the animals or agriculture. Some children had to wait year or two until their siblings were old enough to take on their household jobs (Punch 2001) and often a compromise was reached about when they could leave. Thus as Hashim argues: “children do make strategic life choices and negotiate with adults to do so” (2006: 26).

Leinaweaver presents an in-depth discussion of a young Peruvian girl who chose to move into an orphanage because “she identified the constraints placed upon her both via her constructed position as a child and through her family’s poverty and vulnerability, and worked to mitigate them to a degree that she could achieve some control over her path” (2007: 387). Hence, the young people’s stage in the lifecourse can be important in their decision to migrate, and they balance that alongside their household responsibilities. As Gardner points out:

... we need to consider how decisions to move are part and parcel of personhood and the construction of identity, or interrelated with the household development cycle. (2007: 15)

She argues that young men from Sylhet in Bangladesh are so keen to move to work in Indian restaurants in Britain partly because “movement abroad is linked to the construction of an active, adult male hood” (Gardner 2007: 15). Similarly, young Bolivians leave to work in Argentina partly to pursue the enhanced status of a migrant identity (Punch 2007a). The stage of the lifecourse impacts upon the decision to migrate (see also Gardner 2007). For young people it can be central to their youth transitions from childhood to adulthood (Carpena-Mendez 2007): from school to work, from unpaid work to paid work, from their parents’ household to forming a new household of their own (Punch 2002). We need to be aware of the limitations of the concept of ‘transition’ as it can over-simplify a complex often fragmented process (EGRIS 2001; Wyn and Dwyer 1999), yet it is still a useful way of understanding the importance of the lifecourse in processes of migration (Punch 2002). Ultimately the decision to migrate is made within a range of opportunities and constraints, and can be for individual reasons or family reasons, but often it is a combination of both.

## **MIGRATING FOR WORK: EXPERIENCES**

Recent research with independent child migrants has highlighted the variety and complexity of children's migratory experiences. For some children their experience is more negative, and for others it is more positive overall, but often there are a mixture of both advantages and disadvantages for the same migrant. Perhaps a useful question to ask is: what is the criteria for 'successful' migration? For example, is it the ability to save money and accumulate resources, or is it to do with emotional happiness, perhaps meeting a partner? Is it individual success or being in a position to contribute more to the household back home, or is it learning new skills? Furthermore, is return migration perceived to be a good or a bad thing? Some people hate the arduousness of migrant work, in particular the long hours and the poor conditions, and they may rather have less money but be in their home setting instead of being an unwelcome outsider in a hostile environment (Punch 2002). Other migrants can bare those hardships because of the opportunity to earn higher levels of income (Hashim 2006: 16; Punch 2002). Hence, it is important to seek the young migrants' own views regarding their positive and negative experiences of migration.

Positive benefits of migrating that have emerged in the recent literature are closely linked to the reasons why children decide to migrate as discussed previously. Migration can be a learning experience, a 'rite of passage' where children become more socially and economically independent. The majority receive material benefits, often a higher income than they could earn in their home community, which enables access to more consumer goods as well as being able to send remittances home and being able to contribute more to their family. Migration can offer an opportunity to learn new skills, such as different agricultural techniques or even new domestic skills. Even though this is often a reason for new migrants to be paid less in their first job or for an initial period, the new skills can be beneficial. Other social benefits include meeting new people, seeing new places and experiencing new things (Castle and Diarra 2003).

The availability of social networks at the migrant destination can also enhance the likelihood of children having a more positive migrant experience. However, even when things go badly, children often develop coping strategies and build up resilience, and this can lead to them gaining self-confidence from their ability to cope (Boyden et al. 1998). Furthermore, working at a migrant destination is not always tougher than experiences of working back home so can seem relatively more positive in comparison to what they are used to (Johnson et al. 1995). By seeking migrant work, children are opening up a wider range of future options, albeit limited ones, as they may then be able to decide whether to stay, move on, or return. Sometimes they may also enable their younger siblings to benefit as their remittances can be used to pay for their sibling's studies (Bourdillon 2007; Boyden et al. 1998; Camacho 1999). Furthermore, migration may enable children to create a new identity and this may be either positive or negative:

Migration, then, is not simply a case of moving from place to place, or of uprooting contexts and identity. Rather, it involves becoming part of a place. It involves not just settling, but settling in, where place and identity interact in daily activities and social relations. Our young research participants had no

desire to retain an identity as migrants – indeed, a migrant identity was quite negative. (Ansell and van Blerk 2007)

Thus for the children in their study in Lesotho and Malawi the migrant identity was stigmatising but for other young migrants it can enhance their social status. For example, having a migrant identity when back home in their rural community in Bolivia was very positive and was perceived to be an important part of their youth identity (Punch 2007a). In Mexico, Carpena-Mendez (2007) found that migrant children could blur the boundaries between urban and rural identity. Thus this emphasises how a particular experience for one set of young migrants can be experienced very differently by other migrants. Furthermore, other factors intervene so that children's migration experiences should only be considered as positive or negative (or both) on an individual basis.

Negative experiences can be particularly marked at the beginning of the migrant journey, as the process of leaving home for the first time can be emotionally difficult and overwhelming (Ansell and van Blerk 2007). Many young migrants talk about loneliness and homesickness especially at first, but to varying degrees. In Bolivia some girls described how they were unable to sleep in a room by themselves as they had always been used to sharing bedrooms, and even beds, with their siblings and/or parents. Whilst learning new skills can be a positive aspect of migration, it can also be problematic especially whilst having to adapt to a new environment. The working conditions can be arduous for some migrants, such as very long hours, low pay, having to work in the heat or with flies. Living conditions can also be difficult to endure such as a lack of space and comfort, cramped sleeping arrangements or insufficient food. Having limited social networks in the migrant destination can make it much harder for migrants to cope. Some migrants may suffer physical, verbal, or sexual abuse from their employers or others at their place of work, and many describe different levels of stigma or discrimination attached to their migrant position.

The extent to which migration is a positive or negative experience can depend on a wide range of factors that for most migrants they may move back and forth between positive and negative experiences in different contexts, with different people and at different times of the migration process. As Yaqub says: "Children's vulnerability is not an absolute state. There are degrees of vulnerability, depending on the situation of the child" (2007a: 6). Thus, migrant children experience shifting vulnerabilities in different contexts or aspects of their lives, and their highs and lows move back and forth on a continuum according to different factors. Therefore, the process of migration can be both empowering and disempowering:

... rural young people can be both constrained and enabled by their experience of leaving the community. Migration can lead to young people feeling empowered and powerless in different ways at the same time. (Punch 2007b)

Initially it can be very difficult and intimidating to leave their relatively isolated rural community, as Mónica says about her first trip to Argentina when she was 17: 'I didn't go out and I didn't know anybody there. I didn't dare go further away or anywhere on my own.' Hence, migration can make children feel vulnerable, lonely and relatively powerless, especially at first with the unfamiliarity of a new place. Also, new migrants often receive less pay until they have learnt the appropriate skills,

and, for example, in Argentina Bolivians usually receive less pay than an Argentinean doing the same job which can be disempowering.

However, in another sense, migration can be empowering as it enhances young people's economic and consumer power, enabling them to buy material goods and clothes which they would not otherwise be able to afford. This, along with the wider horizons they have experienced, can increase their status amongst their peers. Also, by contributing economically to their household, they earn more decision-making power and more control over their use of time and space when back home: "Thus, in terms of power, the migrant identity is an ambivalent one, often meaning relative powerlessness in the destination but resulting in increased power and status back home" (Punch 2007b). Many research studies have found, as Camacho did, that:

On the whole, children felt positively about their migration experience; seeing the benefits to themselves and to their families compensates the difficulties experienced and affirms their decision to migrate. (Camacho 2007: 65; see also Hashim 2006; Huijsmans Forthcoming; Swanson Forthcoming 2007)

Hence, children's migratory experiences tend to include a mixture of both positive and negative elements. However, there are some areas in the literature which remain under-explored and merit some further discussion here.

### **Inter-generational relationships**

Independent child migrants by definition leave their community without their parents (Whitehead and Hashim 2005). Their parents may have their own personal histories of migration but they might not have ever migrated before and it may lead to tensions or conflicts of interest. When the children return home either for a short visit or for longer periods there can be a clash of values between the generations, between old and new ideas (Carpena-Mendez 2007; Taracena 2003). For example, Bryceson (2002) gives examples of young people who return after migrating and question authority at both the household and community level. In rural Bolivia, some of the older generation disapproved of the younger return migrants partying and drinking alcohol because in their eyes they were 'wasting' their migrant earnings (Punch 2007a). However, for the young people their short visits back home are an opportunity to let off steam and relax after their hard migrant labour.

Inter-generational relationships can also be mutually supportive and Hashim (2006) discusses the role of the 'inter-generational contract' in relation to children's migration. Thorsen (2005) describes parents giving children advice on how they should behave away from home, and some helped out by paying the transport for their child. A particular area of interest which emerged during my recent research in Bolivia is how the nature of these supportive or conflictual inter-generational relationships change over the lifecourse. For example, as parents get older and are less able to engage in intensive rural labour, the role of children's remittances become more important. Sometimes pressure is put on the youngest sibling to take on responsibility for caring for older parents instead of migrating. Other older parents are considering the possibility of migrating to be with their children either on a temporary or permanent basis. It is important for research to consider how inter- and intra-



generational relations are renegotiated over time, and that they may involve both cooperation and conflict.

### **Intra-generational relationships**

In the available literature on children's independent migration, most of the discussion of household relationships focuses on children's relations with their parents rather than intra-generational relationships with siblings. Siblings can also play an important role in the migration process both during decision-making and at the destination, particularly if their parents have never migrated before. In my Bolivian research I found that siblings were often an extremely crucial source of support: sharing their migrant experiences, travelling together, or helping them seek work:

Intra-generational relations also influence the ways in which power is distributed within the household. The hierarchy of the birth order shapes siblings' opportunities and constraints regarding work, education and migration. (Punch 2007b)

Similarly, relations with peers, girlfriends and boyfriends is an under-researched area yet important in shaping the migration process (see Bell 2007). In rural Bolivia several girls became pregnant in their early teens and this impacted strongly on their ability to migrate. Some were unable to migrate, whereas others travelled shorter distances whilst leaving their child with his/her grandparents. Some pregnancies resulted in the grandparents raising the children as their own whilst the mother continued to migrate. Single parenthood shapes girls' migrant pathways in particular. The nature and impact of parenthood during early youth is an area requiring further research.

### **Youth transitions**

Given that it is a relatively new focus of migration literature, independent child migration is under-theorised. The concept of 'youth transitions' may be a useful framework to understand some children's processes of migration. 'Youth transitions' do not just refer to transitions from school to work, or from unpaid work to paid work, but also includes other kinds of transitions such as leaving home, forming a new household, developing new relationships, getting married, and having children. Many of these impact upon the decision to migrate as well as shape the experience of migration. For example, once children leave home, migration means they have to find new living arrangements and sometimes this leads to them forming their own household. This may involve acquiring housing and/or access to land for the present and/or for the future. If opportunities for building or acquiring their own house arise, this is likely to influence their decision on whether to stay or return. Young people may meet their partners or future spouses during their process of migration. Depending on when and where they meet, they may have to decide how to combine their migrant experiences and destinations (they may be working in different places) and previous families (sender communities). If they have children and start a new family of their own, this leads to further decisions regarding whether to migrate as a family or whether the wife and children will stay behind, and if so, in whose household? The nature of different youth transitions may thus shape the type of migration which young people undertake.

## **Type of migration**

There are many different types of migration which both adults and children engage in. Lynch (2005) identifies a range of movements between rural and urban areas:

... including step-wise migration (village – town – city), circulatory migration (village – city – village), cyclical migration (associated with seasonal variation in labour demand), multi-locational households (where households have members in town and country) and chain migration (where migrants follow their predecessors, are assisted by them in establishing an urban base). (Lynch 2005: 96)

Migration is often a dynamic process involving a variety of movements between households in different areas. One of the advantages of conducting longitudinal ethnographic research is the insights this can bring to understanding the flexibility and flow of children and young people as they move back and forth between their home community and their migrant destinations. Furthermore, many migrants do not just settle in one location but may move on seasonally or yearly depending on available opportunities or difficulties that arise. Thus, young migrants may move through a variety of jobs and move on to different places. This may be seasonal according to where the work is, or it may be opportunistic and based on who they meet. New friends may introduce them to new opportunities or they may decide to move on somewhere different together. Hence independent child migration can be mobile and flexible, resulting in uncertain pathways and fragmented youth transitions. Migrants can live precarious lives being quite dependent on changes in global and local economies. Consequently they have to be flexible in order to adapt to changing circumstances both in the wider environment and in their private lives (moving through the lifecourse, having children, parents getting older and needing more support etc.). As Ansell says in relation to her research in Southern Africa: “The labour migration complex is not static, but constantly evolving” (2000: 155).

Migration is a widespread coping strategy for economically poor households as by diversifying their livelihood options, they reduce their risks and vulnerability (Ansell 2000; Hauge Riisøen et al. 2004; Yaqub 2007a). Many households in the majority world depend on migrant remittances for survival (Francis 2000). Children routinely contribute to the economic maintenance of their households from an early age in a range of different ways (Punch 2001). Thus, migration of children and young people is another way that they actively participate in their own and their household's livelihoods. In the minority world this is not a common experience and work is not a key component of the way childhood is socially constructed. However, globally more children live in the majority world so the experience of child migration is fairly significant and is central to many rural livelihoods, even though reliable statistics are difficult to find to illustrate this. Furthermore, as work is central to many majority world childhoods (Punch 2003), the fact that children seek migrant work opportunities is unlikely to be culturally unacceptable or perceived as inappropriate by the children themselves or by their parents. Hence we need to move away from minority world assumptions that independent child migration is a necessarily exploitative or damaging experience for children.

## **MIGRATION FOR EDUCATION: REASONS**

For many young people living in rural areas in the majority world, if they wish to continue to secondary education they have to migrate as only primary education is available nearby (Ansell 2004; Punch 2004). Schools in rural areas can be under-resourced and the teaching quality can be poor which may lead young people to migrate to better schools (Bey 2003). In some parts of the majority world, young people are under pressure to continue schooling because an educated identity is linked to increased status (for example Jeffrey et al. 2004; Skinner and Holland 1996). Many children end up combining work and education by migrating to work in order to pay for school themselves because their parents are not able to support them (Camacho 1999). Hashim (2005) gives examples of children migrating to work for certain periods of time and then going back home to continue their schooling. In Bolivia I found examples of migrant children who were working during most of the day and studying in the evening: two girls worked as domestic maids and a boy worked as a mechanic in order to fund their secondary education. The availability of 'fostering' situations can also provide children with an opportunity to continue their education (Hashim 2005). For example, some children in Bolivia would go and live with relatives or friends in town, helping out with a range of domestic chores in return for free board and lodging whilst they attended school.

The key motivation underlying all of the above reasons to migrate for education is to improve their future employment prospects. However, many children end up rejecting migration for education and choosing work instead for a range of reasons. For example, the structural constraints of education in rural areas can lead to young people rejecting further schooling as an option for improving their future livelihoods. This includes constraints such as limited resources, lack of available teaching materials, inadequate infrastructure, poor quality of teaching and low wages for teachers (Punch 2004) which all lead to a poor perception of schooling. Some children do not continue with their education because they feel under pressure to start earning an income and having access to cash (Aiken et al. 2006; Bey 2003). For other children, the more tangible benefits received by migrating for work, can mean that migration for education seems less attractive (Levinson 1996; Punch 2007a). Some have a realistic view that in their socio-economic context pursuing education is unlikely to lead to a better livelihood; it can be a large financial sacrifice but with a very uncertain outcome (Punch 2004). Thus, it can be rational for children to give up schooling where labour markets are limited and structured, as they may not be able to obtain formal employment afterwards. As with the decision to migrate in order to work, the decision to migrate for education can also be influenced by parents and/or siblings to varying degrees.

## **MIGRATION FOR EDUCATION: EXPERIENCES**

Similar to children's migrant work experiences, it is likely that their migrant education experiences are both positive and negative and that these change over time and in relation to different aspects of their daily migrant lives. However, there tends to be an assumption that continuing education is a good thing and as far as I know, there is not much research which discusses the negatives of pursuing an education as a migrant (except Jeffrey et al. 2004 who discuss the difficulties of becoming educated and then not being able to get work). In fact there seems to be limited research which

explores children's views of what it is like to migrate for education (except Hashim 2005). Camacho briefly discusses child domestic workers' experiences of combining their work with education, attributing "their academic difficulties to the heavy workload leaving them little time to study, or being too tired to pay attention in class" (1999: 62). Camacho (2007) has also argued that if children are working in order to pay for their own schooling, then household resources can be used to send their siblings to school. However, on the whole, we know little about what happens to children who decide to continue their education rather than migrate for work, or who combine migrant work and education, and the extent to which they have positive or negative experiences.

From my recent follow-up study in Bolivia, I asked a 22 year old girl, Ines, about her previous experiences of migrant education which were by no means positive: "I lacked everything that they asked for in the schools in town. I needed a uniform, I needed books". However, it was not merely an economic struggle as she felt that the standard of schooling was quite different in the town compared with the countryside:

When I went the first year I almost didn't know anything... It was like learning from scratch. ... Almost all those who go from the countryside, fail.

She also realised she did not have the clothes that they had nor the same way of speaking: "Many of the pupils who are from the town are well dressed. They have loads of clothes.... I had some new clothes but they weren't like their clothes." This made her feel uncomfortable and there were hardly any pupils from the countryside in her school so finally: "That's why I stopped going. It was different, even the way of speaking. ... When we were outside in the playground, I almost didn't speak." The large differences between urban and rural education were too much for her and she felt like she would never fit in. Eventually she left school and returned to her home community. Ines' experiences of migration for education were quite negative because of both economic and social differences between her and the town pupils, and between the style of rural and urban education. However, further research is required to explore other migrant children's experiences of education.

## **INFLUENTIAL FACTORS**

Children's reasons for migrating and their subsequent experiences can be shaped by a range of factors including the social, cultural and economic context, gender, age and household composition. The cultural context shapes whether children migrate or not depending on whether there is a tradition of migration, and on the cultural meanings attached to 'childhood' and 'migrant work'. The social context, in terms of available social networks and parents' attitudes (supportive or not), and the economic context, in terms of available work and education opportunities and constraints, also both influence the likelihood of whether children migrate or not.

Children's experience of work can be affected by gender as the type of work can be strongly gendered: "they often enter the same labour market as adult migrants from the same area" (Whitehead and Hashim 2005: 30). Huijsmans (Forthcoming) concluded that more girls than boys were migrating from Lao PDR to Thailand. Hashim (2005: 32) found that girls are less embedded in the social, cultural and economic relations of the community in Ghana so are more able to migrate than boys

as they are seen as temporary household members. A key reason for girls migrating can be to save to buy things for marriage and to learn a skill to have their own possibility for income-generation.

The evolving capacities of the child impacts upon their migration experiences. For example, Hashim (2006) found that younger children (7-13yrs) had less active involvement in the decision to migrate whereas older children (13-18yrs) were more likely to choose to migrate, often having to negotiate with parents in order to be able to (see also Iversen 2006). Many of the examples given in this paper tend to be in relation to older children, 13 to 18 years old. There is much less research available with the younger age group, partly because the majority of independent child migrants are 13 or above. Hauge Riisøen et al. (2004) state that “As a child grows older, the causes for moving change.” The stage in the lifecourse is an important factor which influences children’s decision to migrate or not. Further research is needed in particular with the children under 13 years of age in order to explore the differences between the younger and older age groups. As already mentioned, for older children, the notions of youth transition and rite of passage become an important part of why they decide to migrate. Furthermore, the structure of a household (age and availability of household members) is likely to influence when and whether children migrate, particularly in relation to children’s position in the birth order and the sibling composition (Punch 2001).

Whitehead and Hashim point out that: “Many of its positive and negative effects do not arise from the fact of migration itself, but depend on what triggers movement, what kinds of circumstances migrants move to and, of course, the distance moved and the length of stay away” (2005: 45). It is worth bearing in mind that this can be as much about migration for work as for education. Therefore, other factors that may affect the quality of children’s migratory experience include the reason for migrating, the type of work/school, the migrant location, the climatic conditions, the working/studying and living conditions, the relationship with employer/teacher, availability and accessibility of social networks, the length of migration and opportunities for visits back home.

## **STUDYING MIGRATION: METHODS**

It is important to fully understand the social, cultural and economic context at both the sender and destination communities. For example, we need to know what children’s pre-migrant life was like in order to grasp the relative positives and negatives of their migrant lifestyle. Furthermore, in order to understand the migrant experience we need to explore their everyday lives as migrants and not just narrowly focus on their work or school situation. Hence it can be useful to conduct multi-sited research at both the sender and destination communities (see also Bastia 2005). Camacho (2007) made a call for seeking multiple perspectives in migration research including children, parents, siblings, and employers and this could lead to a wider understanding of the relevant issues.

A common research method is to use interviews in order to focus on the nature of the migration process: the decision, the journey, getting a job, working conditions, pay and remittances, etc. However, everyday life at the destination can be overlooked if only interviews are used. For example, the ways in which they negotiate relationships

with their employers and co-workers, or their relations with others at the destination, their social life and what they do when they are not working may be harder to grasp via an interview. An ethnographic approach, combining interviews with participant observation, can enable a fuller understanding of the wider implications of the specific local context, both at home and away. Ethnographic research can lead to a more holistic exploration of children's everyday lives as migrants, by exploring different arenas of their daily lives and not just concentrating on their work or education.

Furthermore, Yaqub (2007b) discusses how children's migrant experiences can have lifetime implications but that there is limited research in this area. The majority of migration research is a snapshot in time and is rarely longitudinal. We need more longitudinal research which can capture the changes over time and over the lifecourse. We know that migrants may engage in step-migration and can be quite mobile, so it would be useful to find out what happens next in their lives and the impact that migration can have on their livelihoods over time.

## **FURTHER RESEARCH**

Despite some recent studies outlined here, research on independent child migration is still limited. As mentioned, there is a need for more ethnographic, multi-sited, multiple perspectives and longitudinal research. Some areas are particularly lacking such as the experiences of children who migrate for education, and the impact of birth order and sibling relationships. Siblings can have an extremely important role during both the decision to migrate and the experience of migration if they are at the destination together, but it is often overlooked.

The impact of, and links with, other youth transitions also requires further research particularly regarding children's changing relationships and forming a new household of their own. New relationships, such as having a girlfriend or a boyfriend or new friendships, influence children's motivations for migrating or returning as well as shape their migratory experiences, but we know very little about this. Similarly further exploration on the gendered impacts of youth transitions, such as pregnancy and parenthood, is also required. Given that many young migrant pathways can be flexible, dynamic and opportunistic, further research into how their migrant trajectories change over time and over the lifecourse is necessary. For example, in majority world countries where there may be no pensions or welfare system does children's course of migration change as their parents become older and unable to work?

Some more research on the impacts of child migration processes on the sender and destination communities would also be useful. In particular, research could explore in greater detail the decisions and experiences of return migrants, both those who are perceived as successful and as 'failures'. Finally, it is also of interest to consider the experiences of those who do not migrate: the siblings who are left behind or the non-migrant households who never go.

## **CONSTRAINED CHOICES**

The evidence seems to suggest that many child migrants are able to cope and build up resilience but we do need to remember that often their migration experience is a coping strategy to enable them to get by within the structural constraints that they face. They can assert their agency to a certain extent but it is within structural limits. Huijsmans (Forthcoming) discusses the ambiguity about 'free choice'. Children may have positive migrant experiences but this is relative to the wider negatives that surround their lives. In other words, they have limited options or alternatives. Many are migrating to work as domestic maids or on agricultural plantations or other low paid, low skilled, low status jobs. They come from areas that lack opportunities and development, so as Hashim points out: "These children are exercising agency to choose the least worst option" (2006: 28). Thus, research with independent child migrants should consider both children's agency and structural constraints:

We need to understand how different migratory contexts alter the balance of children's agency and opportunities on the one hand, and risks and vulnerabilities on the other. (Yaquib 2007a: 3)

As Camacho says, we should be trying to move away from polarising children's experiences:

... acknowledging the complexities and subjectivities in children's migration experiences calls for an approach that rejects the conventional contrast between children as passive pawns and vulnerable preys or as active and autonomous agents in the migration process. (Camacho 2007: 65)

Therefore, we need to think more in terms of a continuum of experiences and try to strike a balance between exploring the range of positives and negatives that exist at both the sender and destination communities. We should strive to consider the different arenas of migrant children's everyday lives, rather than just focusing on their work or education experiences, and combine different perspectives: both adults' views (parents, employers, teachers) and children's opinions (siblings, friends, peers). It is also important to explore the impact of both inter-generational and intra-generational relationships on the migration process. Finally when exploring both children's agency and the structural constraints they work within, it is appropriate to consider how these change over time and as they move through the lifecycle:

... young people can be both powerful and powerless simultaneously with respect to different aspects of their social worlds. Their everyday lives move back and forth along a continuum of diverse experiences in relation to changing degrees of power and powerlessness. Power relationships are negotiated and renegotiated with different people in different contexts at different times. Interdependent power relations within rural households are dynamic and evolve over the life course. As children acquire economic power, this tends to increase their social power and relationships between children and parents are renegotiated accordingly. (Punch 2007b)

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<sup>1</sup> I prefer to use the recent terms: majority world and minority world to refer to the developing world and the developed world respectively. These terms invite us to reflect on the unequal relations between the two world areas. The minority world consists of a smaller proportion of the world's population and land mass despite using the majority of the world's resources.

<sup>2</sup> This included ethnographic research for my Ph.D on children's everyday lives in rural Bolivia conducted during July 1993 to July 1995, and July to December 1996, and a four month follow up study from April to July 2006. During the follow-up study (funded by the British Academy) I traced 14 of the original 18 sample households in order to explore what the children had done in the past ten years since I had last seen them. Only five of the school pupils aged 8-14 years in 1996 were still in the community in 2006. Over half had migrated to work in Argentina and others to the nearby town of Tarija. Girls tended to migrate to domestic work and boys to agricultural plantations in the north of Argentina. Only three were continuing with their secondary school education in Tarija.

Migrant children often struggle to get access to good quality education and learning opportunities in their host countries due to a variety of barriers that are both individual and systemic. As a result, their learning is interrupted. There has been a global realization of the need to protect migrant children's right to education and address barriers to their education access (Hashim, 2005). In the 2016 Agenda for Action on Children, Migration and Displacement, UNICEF called on governments to protect children's rights and to "keep all refugee and migrant children learning" (UNICEF 2017: 111-11). Other children do not move, but are nevertheless affected because they live in communities that send or receive large numbers of migrants. Some children are return migrants or have been repatriated. Children left behind may benefit from having migrant parents. Innocenti Social Monitor 2004 reported that remittances sent home by parents can increase consumption, finance schooling, buy health care and fund better housing. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is the duty of any country to ensure that all children enjoy their rights, irrespective of their migration status or that of their parents. Children are affected by migration in all regions of the globe, but the understanding of its effects is highly limited. Whether it be the number of children requiring school places, the attainment of pupils or the number of teaching and support staff in schools, the impact and contribution of international migration on the education sector is a topic of high public interest. Explore what the current evidence shows for your local area using our interactive tools.