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Fragmenting the family?

The complexity of household migration strategies in post-apartheid South Africa

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Abstract: The disruption of family life is one of the important legacies of South Africa's colonial and apartheid history. Families were undermined by deliberate strategies implemented through the pass laws, forced removals, urban housing policy, and the creation of the homelands. Despite the removal of legal restrictions on permanent urban settlement and family co-residence for Africans, patterns of internal and oscillating labour migration have endured, dual or stretched households continue to link urban and rural nodes, children have remained less urbanized than adults, and many grow up without co-resident parents. Although children are clearly affected by adult labour migration, they have tended to be ignored in the migration discourse. A focus on children provides an unusual lens for considering migration dynamics and can help to advance an understanding of the complexities of household arrangements and migration processes for families. In this mixed methods study, we use nationally representative panel data to investigate migration patterns when viewed from the perspective of children. We then draw on a detailed case study to reflect on the contributions of quantitative and qualitative data sources for enhancing our understanding of the migration strategies undertaken by families.

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1   Introduction

The disruption of family life is one of the important legacies of South Africa's colonial and apartheid history. The marginalization of Africans in 'homelands', where there were few employment opportunities, forced Africans to migrate to 'White' urban areas to find employment, but a range of restrictions prevented family migration or permanent settlement at the urban destination. The migrant labour system meant that it was mainly men who worked in urban areas or on the mines, while the rural homelands became places for 'surplus' people whose labour contributions were not needed (Platzky and Walker 1985). Children formed a substantial part of that surplus population, along with women and the elderly.

Despite the removal of legal impediments to permanent urbanization and family co-residence for Africans, patterns of internal and oscillating labour migration have endured, dual or stretched households continue to link urban and rural nodes, and children have remained less urbanized than adults (Hall and Posel 2018; Posel 2010). Along with neighbouring countries that historically provided migrant labour, South Africa has uniquely high rates of parental absence from children's lives (Hall and Posel 2012; Martin 2016; Posel and Devey 2006).

Importantly for children, internal labour migration rates increased in the first decade after apartheid, driven mainly by a rise in the share of migration by prime-age women (Collinson et al. 2007; Posel 2010; Posel and Casale 2003). It is only since the lifting of apartheid laws that women have migrated in substantial numbers (Williams et al. 2011). At the same time, rates of marriage and union formation, already low, continued to fall, remittances declined and unemployment rates remained persistently high (Hunter 2010; Leibbrandt et al. 2010; Posel and Rudwick 2013). Households, and women especially, may have to make difficult choices about how to manage the competing demands of childcare and income generation.

Internationally, and despite efforts to improve data on migration, quantitative surveys have tended to 'pay minimal attention to children' (Castaldo et al. 2009: 5), and this is also true in South Africa. Commentators have pointed out that children often migrate 'as a consequence of many of the same processes that stimulate adult migration, and in response to living arrangements that emerge due to adult migration' (Hosegood and Ford 2003: 1). But children do not necessarily migrate together with adults, and it cannot be assumed that their migration patterns follow the timing or directions of parents. Rather, children 'participate in migration, both independently, as well as with their parents and caregivers as households relocate' (Richter et al. 2006: 197) and children are also left behind when parents migrate.

In this paper, we address two main questions, one substantive and one methodological. First, what are the dynamics of children's mobility within South Africa and how do these interact with patterns of maternal migration? Second, what insights into migration dynamics and associated household arrangements are gained through qualitative research?

Migration is fascinating from a disciplinary perspective as it lends itself to study by geographers, demographers, economists, sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, and anthropologists. Yet, far from being an interdisciplinary melting pot, empirical research on migration has taken divergent methodological directions, with what has been described as a widening gap between quantitative (mainly positivist) and qualitative (interpretive) approaches. Both have been critiqued for failing to connect adequately with theoretical frameworks and both have been accused of patently failing to explain real-world patterns of migration (De Haas 2014; Potts 2011). Taking into account the limitations and critiques of migration research, the paper draws on a mixed

methods study designed to allow for breadth and depth, for a reflection on method, and for some integration of analytical perspective. Quantitative analyses paint a national picture of children's household form and mobility patterns. A single case study, spanning a three-generation family, deepens and augments the picture through the micro-world of a family, providing the nuance, complexity, and texture that survey data cannot.

In the next section, we discuss migration in the South African context; in Section 3, we present the quantitative data that we use to explore child and maternal migration. We then analyse these data in Section 4, which describes child–parent co-residential arrangements and how these have changed over the post-apartheid period, and in Section 5, which investigates child migration in relation to maternal migration. We present the case study in Section 6 and conclude the paper with a discussion and summary in Section 7.

2 Context and concepts: migration, family fragmentation, and the fluidity of households

Family fragmentation (and concern about it) is not new. Historical studies of kinship have described the extended and complex structure of families in southern Africa, where family members were not always present and children did not always live with their biological parents (Murray 1981).

The practice of distributing (and moving) children across households is well documented, and as Russell (2003b: 25) writes, 'almost certainly predate[s] the economic and political upheavals of colonialism and industrialism'. African children move between households to provide help with errands and companionship to other kin, and according to the household's ability to support children. 'In southern Africa, children are expected especially to spend time in the household of their grandparents' (Russell 2003b: 25).

Labour migration to (and within) South Africa also predates apartheid; the extended separation of migrants from their home environments was common in the region as far back as the late nineteenth century (Murray 1981; Russell 2003a; Walker 1990). Nonetheless, the deliberate disruption of households and families by the apartheid regime, or what Budlender and Lund refer to as the 'state-orchestrated destruction of family life' (2011: 926), is widely acknowledged to have had a massive and lasting effect on African household structure (see, for example, Amoateng and Heaton 2007; Budlender and Lund 2011; Madhavan and Schatz 2007; Reynolds and Burman 1986). The effects on household form would certainly have influenced living arrangements for children, and it was observed that the impact on African household structure 'will probably be slow to work itself out … the effects of decades of this system could therefore be expected to survive … the demise of the system itself' (Simkins 1986: 18).

South Africa and its neighbouring countries remain unique in the extent of parental absence from children's lives. A recent international study of childcare and co-residence arrangements found that, of the 77 countries studied, the three with the lowest rates of parental co-residence were South Africa (where 35 per cent of children lived with neither of their biological parents), Namibia (27 per cent) and Swaziland (23 per cent). Lesotho and Zimbabwe also featured in the bottom ten countries (Martin 2016). What these countries have in common is that they supply labour to South Africa.

Important variations in migration patterns have emerged in the post-apartheid period (Todes et al. 2010), and these may have relevance for children's living arrangements. First, and perhaps because

the formal system of migration and labour recruitment no longer exists and mines are no longer major employers, temporary migrants are often involved in insecure and poorly paid work in the informal sector, in domestic employment or security services (Cox et al. 2004).

Second, a rise in 'temporary' labour migration in South Africa between 1993 and 1999 is largely attributed to the feminization of the labour force and the increasing prevalence of migration among women (Hunter 2010; Posel 2004; Posel and Casale 2003). In 1993, women made up 29 per cent of all African adults who were non-resident members of a rural household for reasons of employment (or temporary labour migrants); by 2008 this had increased to 37 per cent (Posel 2010). When migration is defined more broadly to include any move across a municipal boundary, then Schiel and Leibbrandt (2015) estimate that by 2012, rates of male and female migration had equalized.

At a sub-provincial level, women aged 15–25 years appear to be the most mobile group of all. The main categories of adult migrants (irrespective of temporary or permanent migrant status) are: young women moving alone (whether or not they are mothers); women moving with children; and women with men and children (Collinson et al. 2006). Since children are potentially involved in all three, we can assume they are affected by migration—whether they move or are left behind.

In the context of low and falling marriage rates, women typically bear both economic and household responsibilities (Hatch and Posel 2018); responsibilities which they share within female networks that span generations and physical distance. Case studies have illustrated the marginalizing effects of being 'unskilled', rural, and female (Budlender and Lund 2011; Du Toit and Neves 2008), and how this influences choices about where to live and how to access income. Urban destinations may offer opportunities for income generation, but can further marginalize women and their children by removing them from established chains of care, and childcare can be unaffordable in the absence of kinship networks (Bray 2008).

Moreover, places of residence at destination areas may be unfit or unsafe for children. Informal settlements (or squatter camps) are important transitional spaces for urban migration. Informal housing can be used as an initial point of access to the city for migrants who cannot obtain their own property through formal processes (Gilbert and Crankshaw 1999; Lemanski 2009), and who are able to access only informal or precarious forms of employment. The main kinds of informality in urban areas are settlements on demarcated or invaded land, and backyard shacks on existing properties. There are known risks associated with informality—particularly for young children, who are vulnerable to a range of threats associated with crowded conditions, poor or absent water, sanitation and refuse removal services, the use of paraffin stoves and associated risk of fire or poisoning, perpetual problems with drainage and flooding, and long distances to reach health facilities and schools.

Children therefore often remain at the rural home of origin when mothers migrate from rural areas, an arrangement that is made possible by the availability of substitute caregivers, particularly grandmothers in the sending area (Ardington et al. 2009; Madhavan et al. 2012; Posel et al. 2006). The presence of children at the home of origin, in turn, may serve to sustain ties between urban and rural nodes. While the terms 'fragmentation' or 'dissolution' are commonly used to describe household dispersion as a negative consequence of migration patterns, or even abandonment, the practice of leaving children with family members in households of origin could also be regarded as the opposite—a strategy to retain an unfragmented (albeit spatially dispersed) household.

Much of the South African discourse on migration stems from international models: the determinants of voluntary migration are seen as being primarily an individual choice about labour and income. The broadening of migration theory to include social networks is linked to the new

economics of labour approach described by Stark and Levhari (1982), which has parallels in anthropology's 'household strategies' approach. An example of the latter is found in Trager's (1991) rich study of migration and family dependence in the Philippines. The theoretical introduction to her work identifies two dominant perspectives that articulate broadly with rational choice and dependency theory, but can also be defined by their level of focus: the micro-level (which focuses on individual decision-making) in terms of rational choice, and the macro-level (focusing on the structural-historical determinants of migration) using dependency theory. To these she adds an intermediate level: the household and social networks. These in turn enable different levels of focus in that social networks 'provide a broader category of relationships than does analysis of household alone' but they are similar in 'providing access to a middle level of social organisation' (Trager 1991: 8). A child-centred lens on migration can help to craft a perspective that encompasses the social systems within and beyond the household, precisely because children are highly mobile, their care arrangements fluid, and in the case of young children at least, their needs uniquely different from those of adults.

Migration is now widely viewed as a cumulative and self-perpetuating process, facilitated over time by a network of kin, extended kin, and social networks. Migration gains momentum through a process of 'cumulative causation' (Massey 1990; Stark and Levhari 1982). Thus 'the propensity to migrate grows over time through expansion and intensification of the migrant network' (Zelinsky 1971, cited in Collinson et al. 2006). Migrant networks are described as a key mechanism for securing accommodation and accessing land and even job opportunities. But this very mechanism—the dependence on social networks for temporary lodging—may prohibit the simultaneous migration of children.

As with cumulative causation, chain migration is 'the simultaneous or successive migration of individuals or groups from the same origin to the same destination' (Adepoju 2006: 29). Adepoju argues that this process 'has characterised African migration since pre-colonial times … [although] colonial regimes altered the form and nature, and hence the intensity and motivations for such migrations'. A comparatively established literature on international migration has paid attention to children in trans-border family migration (see, for example, Escobal and Flores 2009; Evans 2007; Jeffrey 2010; Orellana et al. 2001; Trager 1991). Categories or ordering of children's migration in relation to their families include simultaneous migration (where children move together with the adult migrant(s)), chain or staged migration (where children are initially left behind, with the expectation that they will later join the migrant destination household), circular or reverse migration (where children are sent away from the migrant home, or sent back to the place of origin), and autonomous or child-led migration (where the child moves independently, or in advance of other household members) (Massey et al. 1993; Orellana et al. 2001).

The migration literature points to migration as a livelihood strategy, but one available only to those who can afford it. The flipside of migration is non-migration or immobility. Given the tendency of humans to move about, it is remarkable that much contemporary migration theory and research appears more interested in mobility than immobility. It is only from the twentieth century that governments have formalized and enforced systems to control and manage international population flows across countries (Massey 2015). De Haas (2014) outlines a proposed aspirations–capabilities migration framework which is not just about push–pull factors that drive migration, but about the capability to be able to respond to those forces and realize aspirations. In these terms, migration is seen as 'a function of aspirations and capabilities to migrate within a given set of opportunity structures' and, drawing on Sen's capabilities approach, human mobility is defined as 'people's capability (freedom) to choose where to live, including the option to stay' (De Haas 2014: 2). De Haas distinguishes between the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions of human mobility, conceptualizing moving and staying as 'complementary manifestations of the same migratory agency'. Where people lack the capability or agency to migrate, De Haas describes this

as involuntary immobility, or displacement in place. This concept is particularly relevant to a study of child mobility in the context of adult labour migration.

3   Quantitative data sources

Given the growing interest in understanding patterns of population mobility and migration in the region, detailed studies of migration patterns are surprisingly scarce. In particular, little is known about family migration and the dynamics of child mobility and care in relation to adult migration. The scarcity of this research is partly due to the limitations of available data (Posel and Casale 2003; Todes et al. 2010), including the constraints of cross-sectional or region-specific data, with narrowly defined households and poorly defined intra-household relationships.

In the quantitative part of this study, we explore child migration in relation to maternal migration using data collected in the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS), a survey conducted by the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) at the University of Cape Town. NIDS was established as South Africa's first national longitudinal survey, and has made a substantial contribution to available data resources on national migration.

First, a distinctive characteristic of NIDS is that it adopts a broad definition of household membership, collecting information on people who are considered to be household members but who are not living in the household for much of the year (non-resident household members). This broad household definition makes it possible to distinguish among parents who do not live with their children, according to whether they are non-resident household members, or absent from the household altogether because they live elsewhere. Second, NIDS tracks resident household members who move within South Africa between survey waves, making it possible to measure migration events in 'real time'.

The first wave of NIDS in 2008 covered a nationally representative sample of nearly 7,300 households, recording information on 28,226 resident members as well as 2,915 non-resident members. Resident members of sampled households who were successfully surveyed in the first wave (including 9,605 children under 15 years old) constituted the baseline wave who were then tracked and interviewed over subsequent waves every two years. Four waves of data were available for the analysis presented in this paper: the baseline in 2008, wave 2 (2010/11), wave 3 (2012), and wave 4 (2014/15).

The child panel analysed in this paper consists only of those who were defined as children throughout the four waves of NIDS (i.e. those who were still under 15 years old in wave 4), spanning the years 2008 to 2014. In order to construct a balanced panel of children who were interviewed in wave 1 and successfully re-interviewed in wave 4, we limited the age group at wave 1 to children under eight years. The balanced panel consisted of 3,750 children who were defined as African (but not necessarily South African).

Despite the low attrition rate for children (less than 10 per cent over the four waves of the panel) there is still a possibility of non-random attrition from the sample, which could bias the results. Logit regressions were used to estimate the likelihood of children attritting between waves 1 and 4, with a particular focus on the vital and co-residence status of mothers, as this is directly relevant to child mobility and care in relation to maternal migration. The likelihood of child attrition after wave 1 decreased with the increasing age of the child (significant at the 99 per cent level), suggesting that if attrition were related to movement of the child, then this was more likely to take place in the early years of a child's life. However, the regressions indicate that the variables of

interest (related to the mother's vital and co-residence status) do not affect child attrition significantly (see Hall 2017 for further details).

We define migration as movement across a municipal district. A migrant child is aged 0–8 years at baseline, who then moved across municipal districts in any of the successive waves. Before exploring patterns of child migration, we describe the extent of parent–child co-residence at the cross-section. To present a longer trend, we also use two cross-sectional national household surveys—the 1993 Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development (PSLSD) and the 2014 General Household Survey (GHS), which collected information on whether a child's mother or father was a deceased or resident member of the household.

4   Children's households and parental co-residence arrangements

Table 1 shows patterns of reported parental co-residence with children under 15 years. In 1993, just over one-third (34.6 per cent) of children had two parents living at home. Co-residence rates then declined further, reaching as low as 27 per cent in 2008 (when HIV-related orphaning reached its peak) and 29 per cent in 2014. Table 1 illustrates the strong role of mothers who, in all years, lived together with nearly half of children in the absence of their fathers, whereas only 2–4 per cent of children lived with their fathers but not their mothers.

Table 1. Parental co-residence with children, 1993–2014

Child lives with	1993	2008	2014
… both parents	34.6(1.06)	27.1(1.37)	28.7(0.62)
… mother, not father	43.4(0.90)	44.7(1.17)	45.3(0.57)
… father, not mother	2.7(0.23)	2.5(0.31)	3.1(0.18)
… neither parent	19.3(0.72)	25.8(0.99)	22.9%(0.44)

Notes: The sample includes African children under 15 years. Standard errors are in parentheses.

Source: authors' calculations, based on PSLSD 1993; NIDS 2008; GHS 2014.

Orphaning is not the main reason for parental absence, but it did increase as a contributing factor after 1993. Table 2 shows that from 1993 to 2014, death as a reason for maternal absence rose threefold. By 2014, approximately 3.2 million children were living without a co-resident mother, of whom 24 per cent had a mother who was deceased. Far more children lived without a co-resident father (8.5 million in total), almost one-fifth of whom were paternal orphans.

Table 2. Contribution of orphaning to parental absence

	1993	2014
Number of children without a co-resident mother	2.6m	3.2m
Mother deceased *(as a percentage of children without co-resident mother)*	8%	24%
Number of children without a co-resident father	7.4m	8.5m
Father deceased *(as a percentage of children without co-resident father)*	11%	19%

Note: The sample includes African children under 15 years.

Source: authors' calculations, based on PSLSD 1993; GHS 2014.

Parents who are alive but absent from the child's household may still retain contact with their children and support them financially. Table 3 uses the baseline wave of NIDS to describe parental contact and financial support to children, distinguishing between parents who are non-resident household members (who would be expected to have a stronger attachment to the household) and those who live elsewhere and are not defined as non-resident members. The table shows that children with non-resident parents are more likely to see their parents at least sometimes, compared to those with parents who live elsewhere and are not considered as part of the household. Similarly, children with non-resident parents are considerably more likely to receive financial support from their parents. This supports the idea that non-residency status, which is often related to the labour migration of parents, signals an attachment with the household of origin and the people in it.

Table 3. Parental contact and financial support to children

How frequently does [parent] see the child?	Mother		Father	
	Non-resident household member	Absent—lives elsewhere	Non-resident household member	Absent—lives elsewhere
Every day	0.4(0.32)	4.3(0.89)	0.0	5.4(0.56)
Several times a week	9.9(2.97)	13.8(1.77)	16.5(6.29)	13.0(0.99)
Several times a month	55.3(5.08)	39.4(2.52)	49.5(5.88)	24.8(1.07)
Several times a year	32.1(2.73)	34.6(2.56)	32.7(5.67)	26.2(1.26)
Never	2.4(1.06)	8.0(1.05)	1.2(0.71)	30.6(1.05)
[Parent] supports the child financially	70.3(5.03)	50.4(2.33)	82.5(3.99)	38.3(1.44)

Notes: The sample includes African children under 15 years. Standard errors are in parentheses.

Source: authors' calculations, based on NIDS 2008.

From a child's perspective, however, it is clear that many absent parents remain in contact even if they are not part of the household. Only 8 per cent of children whose mothers are not household members 'never' see their mother, and well over half see their mothers at least once a month. A similar pattern is observed in respect of fathers: those who live elsewhere are less likely than non-resident members to be in contact with their children and less likely to support them financially. Overall, children are less likely to have contact with absent fathers than with absent mothers: over 30 per cent of children whose fathers live elsewhere never see their fathers. With high rates of paternal absence in the first place, this suggests that substantial numbers of children have fathers who are absent not only from their households but from their lives.

Low rates of co-residence between children and fathers also make it difficult to link children to their fathers in the data. In the remainder of the quantitative analysis, we therefore focus on the residential and mobility arrangements between children and their mothers.

5   Child and maternal migration

5.1   Child migration streams

It is not possible to tell whether child migration rates have increased over the long term in South Africa, as there is no reliable baseline for comparison. NIDS provides the first national panel data from which migration can be measured directly rather than through retrospective reporting, which is less reliable. An analysis of the NIDS data found that 2.5 million children (35 per cent) had moved place and that nearly one million children (14 per cent out of a cohort of seven million) migrated across municipalities from 2008 to 2014 (Hall and Posel, 2018). A transition matrix of sending and receiving geotypes (Table 4) suggests multiple migration streams for children between geography types, including both urban–rural and rural–urban migration.

Table 4. Sending and receiving geotypes for child migrants

Sending destination (2008)	Receiving destination (2014–15)			
	Urban	Rural (traditional authority)	Rural (farms)	Total
Urban	63.62	36.38	–	100
Rural (traditional authority)	46.71	51.64	1.65	100
Rural (farms)	24.21	73.85	1.94	100
TOTAL	53.14	45.96	0.90	100

Notes: The sample is based on the balanced panel of African children aged 0–8 in wave 1 who moved across district municipality boundaries at least once over waves 1–4. Only the final (wave 4) destination is recorded here, although there may have been multiple moves between waves. Panel weights used.

Source: authors' calculations, based on NIDS waves 1 and 4.

There are some differences in the geographic patterns of internal migration of children compared to adults. As with an adult-focused analysis conducted by Schiel and Lebbrandt (2015) using the same data, the modal direction of child migration is to area types that are similar to the sending area (i.e. urban-to-urban or rural-to-rural). In the adult analysis, however, only 26 per cent of migrants from the former homelands had moved to urban areas (compared with 47 per cent of children), while over 70 per cent had remained in rural areas under traditional authority (or the former homelands). However, adults who migrate from an urban area are far more likely than children to remain in an urban area. Schiel and Leibbrandt (2015) found that 85 per cent of adults whose sending areas were urban remained within an urban area after migration, while urban-to-rural migration comprised only 15 per cent. By contrast, Table 4 shows that over one-third (36 per cent) of children who migrated from an urban area ended up in a rural area. The multi-directional movement of children may be related to the independent movement of children in the context of adult labour migration, where, for example, children are sent home from urban to rural households, or brought from rural households to join migrant parents in urban areas (see also Bennett 2015).

5.2 Child and maternal migration

To identify maternal migration status we used the same definition as for children: mothers of children were classified as migrants if they had moved across municipal boundaries at least once during the course of the four panel waves. It was not possible to complete this exercise for all the children in the sample as they could not all be matched to mothers, even when it was established that their mothers were alive.

Mothers were mapped to children using data on the residential status of mothers and their unique person IDs. Of the 3,750 children in the balanced sample, 488 were defined as having migrant mothers (12 per cent when weighted), 2,433 had non-migrant mothers, 326 were already maternally orphaned in wave 1 or their mother died between waves 1 and 4, and 503 had mothers whose migrant status could not be defined because they were not part of the panel.

Child migration is strongly associated with maternal co-residence arrangements. Among all children aged 0–8 in wave 1, whose mother was still alive in wave 4, 22 per cent were not co-resident with their mother at wave 1. These children were significantly more likely to migrate over the course of the panel than children who were co-resident with their mother at baseline (22 per cent migrated compared to 12 per cent of co-resident children), and just over 60 per cent of these child migrations served to unite mother and child.

The majority of children (0–8 years in wave 1) with living mothers were co-resident with their mother at baseline (78 per cent). Among these children, migration is clearly correlated with maternal migration—specifically with maternal work-seeking behaviour. This is shown with a logit regression (Table 5), which estimates the likelihood of child migration in relation to mother's migration status and baseline employment status. The analysis is restricted to children with co-resident mothers in wave 1 whose mothers were still alive in wave 4.

Table 5. Likelihood of child migration by mother's migration and employment status

	Odds ratio	Standard error
Mother migrated	42.952***	0.178
Mother's employment status (wave 1)		
Unemployed: not actively searching	1.090***	0.007
Unemployed: actively seeking work	2.386***	0.012
Employed	1.420***	0.007
Child's age (wave 1)	1.224***	0.003
Child's (age)^2 (wave 1)	0.965***	0.000
Child's geotype (wave 1)		
Urban areas	2.918***	0.012
Commercial farms	8.850***	0.065
Constant	0.013	0.000
Number of observations = 2433		
Log pseudo-likelihood = −1143443.9		

Notes: The sample consists of African children who were aged 0–8 in wave 1 and initially co-resident with their mothers, and whose mothers were still alive at wave 4. The data are weighted to be nationally representative.

Omitted categories: not economically active and traditional authority rural areas.

*** Significant at the 1 per cent level.

Source: authors' analysis of data from NIDS waves 1–4.

Children whose mothers migrated during the course of the panel were 43 times more likely to migrate than those whose mothers did not migrate, when controlling for baseline maternal employment status, the age of the child, and the child's geographic area type. Those whose mothers were actively seeking work (the strict definition of unemployment) were two-and-a-half times more likely to migrate than those whose mothers were not economically active. The strong association between child and maternal migration is corroborated by analyses from other more localized surveys (Bennett et al. 2015; Madhavan et al. 2012).

However, a relationship between child and maternal migration does not imply that these migration events occur at the same time or in the same direction. More than half of all children who migrated from 2008 to 2014 did so independently of their mother in terms of timing. When weighted this amounted to 600,000 independent child migrants (see also Hall and Posel 2018). Moreover, migration events (defined as an event where either the child or mother (or both) migrated over the four waves) do not always unite children with their mothers. Among all children, almost 50 per cent of child–mother migration events resulted in children living with their mothers. Slightly more than half of all migration events therefore separated mothers and children, or maintained their separation.

The spatial patterns of changing co-residence arrangements in the context of migration are explored by comparing the location of the child's receiving household (urban versus rural) across different categories of mother–child co-residence (Figure 1). The analysis is based only on children in the panel who migrated across municipal boundaries between waves 1 and 4, and distinguishes among children who had co-resident, non-resident, or absent mothers in these waves.

Figure 1. Urban/rural location of receiving households for child migrants in wave 4, by change in maternal co-residence status over waves 1–4
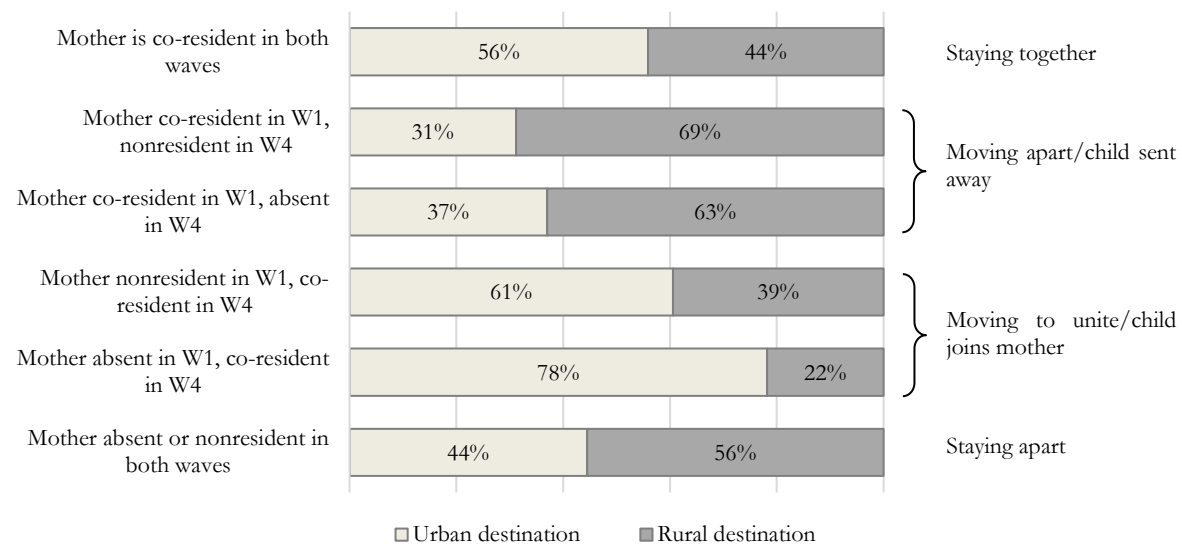
Notes: The sample is based on African children aged 0–8 in wave 1 who experienced a migration event over the panel and whose mothers were alive in wave 4. Panel weights used.

Source: authors' calculations, based on NIDS waves 1 and 4 (mother and child co-residence status); waves 1–4 (child migrant status).

Migrant children who were always co-resident with their mothers were more likely to end up (or remain) in urban areas than rural areas following migration, although this difference is not statistically significant at the 5 per cent level. Migrant children who were always separate from their mothers were more likely to live in rural areas in wave 4, but this difference is also not significant.

The other distributions suggest a clearer link between the geography of moves and maternal co-residence arrangements. Migrant children whose mothers changed from being co-resident in the household to being non-resident or absent were more likely to be living in rural areas than urban areas in wave 4. These categories can be broadly clustered as migrant children who moved apart from their mothers. Conversely, an urban destination was most likely for children who had lived separately from their mothers in wave 1 (i.e. in households where their mothers were non-resident or absent) but were co-resident with their mothers in wave 4. These can be broadly defined as migrant children who united with their mothers.

The most striking and statistically significant contrast in the destination area is among child migrants who joined their absent mother: 78 per cent of those whose mother's residence status had changed from absent to co-resident ended up in urban areas. The distributions suggest that migration to (or between) urban areas can serve to facilitate co-residence with mothers. An example of this would be when a child who previously stayed with a grandmother or other relative at the home of origin is sent to live with her migrant mother in the city. In contrast, migration to (or between) rural areas may serve to separate children from mothers. An example could be when migrant mothers are unable to manage both work (or work-seeking) activities and care responsibilities for young children, and send their children to be cared for at their home of origin.

The analysis of the panel data has shown that children are highly mobile, that their mobility is associated with maternal migration but that the geographic patterns of child migration are different to those of adults. The migration of children may result in their living together with their mothers, but may equally separate them from mothers. The next section presents a case study that illustrates some of the complexity of child and maternal migration and co-habitation arrangements in the context of broader household strategies.

6   Family migration to the city: a case study

This case study centres on the life history and migration experience of a single migrant mother, Lindiwe Jali,[1] her two children, and her extended family, spanning three generations. The study was deliberately chosen as an example of a well-trodden internal migration route between the rural Eastern Cape and the Cape Town metropole. It provides a detailed account of life at the rural and urban ends of a migration path, and of multiple migrations within a single family. The effect of these movements is to link family members, through sequential migration, at the urban end, while retaining an occupied home of origin at the rural end.

Lindiwe was born and grew up in a small village south-east of Willowvale, towards the sea. The area was formerly part of the Transkei, one of the independent homelands created under apartheid and used as a labour reserve for white South Africa. Spread out over a few hills, the total population of the village at the time of the 2011 population census was just 1,200 people, of whom nearly half were under 15 years old. The population pyramid (Figure 2) shows a mass exodus of young adults, particularly men, from the age of 20, and the ratio of children to adults is much higher than the national average. There are few income-generating opportunities in the area other than small-scale subsistence agriculture and a small amount of private construction work.

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[1] Not her real name.

Most of the time Lindiwe lives in Mandela Park,[2] a mainly informal township outside Cape Town with a rapidly growing population of migrants from South African and neighbouring countries. The population pyramid is strikingly different from that of her rural village. It shows a bulge in the population aged 20–40 years and an under-representation of children relative to the prime-age population. The exception is very young children: the pyramid suggests that many children move away after infancy. Mandela Park is a relatively new residential area, only settled in the mid-1990s, so there is no intergenerational history and few elderly people live here. Given that it is mainly informal, suffers regular shack fires, and is severely under-serviced, with about 20 families sharing four toilets and one tap for drinking water, it is not a place where people would want to retire.

Figure 2. Population pyramids for the rural and urban sites
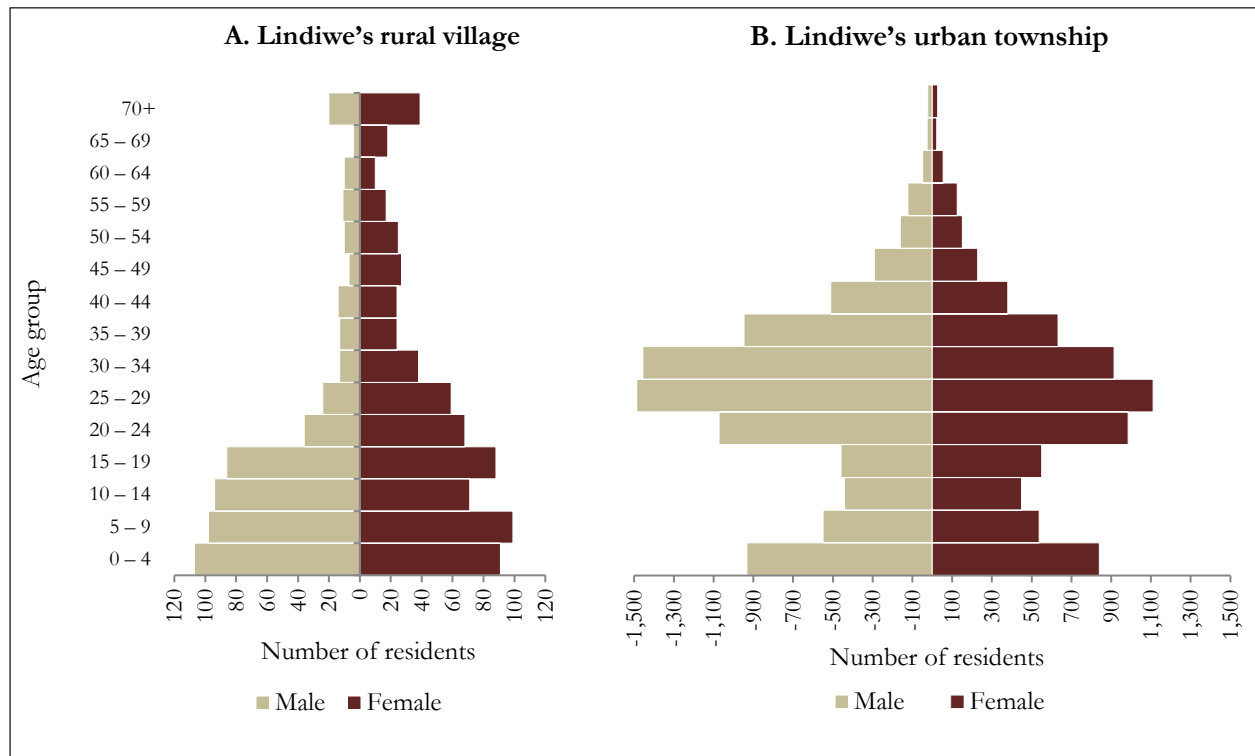
Source: authors' calculations, based on census 2011.

As with quantitative studies, qualitative research can gather retrospective migration histories or participants can be followed over time. The approach used in the case study was a combination of the two, although the main migration events emerged through retrospective reporting. Lindiwe's initial account and its implied causal flow fitted neatly with the idea that if alternative care were available at the home of origin, a migrant mother would be inclined to delay co-migration of her children until she had some security—of employment, housing, or both—before bringing her children to live with her. But things were not as simple as that. Over the nearly two years of research with the same family, the details and timing of migration events altered many times—a clear demonstration of the recall problems that quantitative surveys are likely to face.

Lindiwe's childhood household was what would be described from survey data as a complex, three-generation household. To Lindiwe it was not complex; it was fairly normal compared with other households she knew as a child. Childcare arrangements were shared around the extended

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[2] Officially named Imizamo Yethu, Mandela Park is the name used by most residents, including Lindiwe.

family according to the needs of the children and of adults—an example of household fluidity that is not easily captured by surveys. At one stage Lindiwe's youngest brother was sent to live with an aunt in a neighbouring district to provide company and support because the aunt did not have children of her own.

Important childhood events occurred that set the course of Lindiwe's life: a rape that resulted in her first pregnancy at the age of 15 and the birth of her daughter, Asanda; the emotional and financial shock when her father was murdered over a stolen horse; the fact that Asanda was brought up as her mother's child; and that Lindiwe was forced to drop out of school soon after the birth of her second child, Sipho, when she was sent away to work.

Lindiwe's father had been the pioneer migrant of the family, working in Cape Town until his retirement. After his death, her mother, Noluthando, sent Lindiwe's beloved oldest brother, Bongani, to work in Cape Town so he could send money back to the household. The household still did not have enough money to survive, so Noluthando also started working as a bus operator, taking tickets and looking after the passengers on the bus line from the Eastern Cape to Cape Town. Lindiwe, now 16, was the eldest child at home and was left in charge of her younger siblings and her baby daughter. Their aunt, who lived at a neighbouring homestead, kept an eye on the children and made sure they had food.

When asked how she made the decision to do work that required travel, leaving her children behind, Noluthando explained that there was no other option:

> When you see the situation, you act, you get up and close it because life doesn't stand still. For us people life changes … and so when life changes you decide. I can't even tell my neighbour [the plan]. I just call them to tell them, 'Please look after those children', you see that? You can feel the hardship, but you also have to do whatever. What I mean to say is that when they are left alone it's not that they are not loved, that is the truth, but it's because of the situation.

This theme, the absence of choice, recurred throughout our conversations with both Lindiwe and her mother when we were discussing migration and childcare decisions. In fact the question of where children would live in relation to their caregivers was hardly ever described as a choice between options—just a necessary fact, without alternatives.

When Lindiwe was 20 and had recently given birth to her second child, Sipho, Noluthando decided Lindiwe should go to the city and work, partly to supplement the family income and partly to care for her brother Bongani, who had become sick in Cape Town and had stopped working. Although Lindiwe had not yet finished high school, her mother, desperately working to support all her dependants, could not think about the needs of an individual child—her focus was on the survival of the family. Lindiwe herself wanted to complete her schooling and stay with her children, but she was not in a position to argue—she was the oldest child and had a responsibility to the family. Ultimately it was Noluthando's decision. Lindiwe was very clear: '[The decision] was made by her and not by me.'

Lindiwe and her brother stayed with her aunt's cousin in her shack in Mandela Park, and the cousin helped Lindiwe get a job at a local shebeen (tavern) while she looked for domestic work. The shebeen work was insecure, erratic, and dangerous, keeping her out at night. There was no question of Lindiwe taking her own children with her to Cape Town. At first she thought it was a temporary trip. As time went on it was clear that this was no place for the children: three adults living in a small, crowded, one-roomed shack, one of them bedridden most of the time.

So her daughter Asanda stayed with Noluthando, who had stopped working on the buses altogether, and her son Sipho stayed with his paternal grandmother in another village close to her rural home. Asanda turned six years old and Sipho turned two. They were in a state of what De Haas (2014) would term involuntary immobility in relation to their mother. Lindiwe recounts: 'Oh it was difficult, more especially as I had left Sipho very young…. All along I knew that he was safe where he was because he was with his grandmother, but it was painful—I mean it was not easy.' The following year, Bongani's health deteriorated so badly that they knew it was terminal and he was taken back to the Eastern Cape, where he died. Lindiwe stayed on in Cape Town, doing night shifts at the shebeen.

Back in the Eastern Cape, Asanda was eight years old and was going to a local preschool, but it was time for her to start formal schooling. Lindiwe and her mother agreed that Asanda would move to join Lindiwe in Cape Town so she could start school there. 'The reason why is because when I got here to Cape Town I found that it's better to go to school here. As I went to school in the Eastern Cape, I didn't learn English, and then I found that to learn in Xhosa didn't help me. So I wanted my children to have a better education than me.'

Asanda moved to Cape Town with her grandmother, Noluthando, but little Sipho remained in the Eastern Cape with his grandmother. The family in Cape Town stayed in a shack belonging to their cousin, with Lindiwe still working at the shebeen but also looking for a job as a domestic worker.

The informal settlement of Mandela Park is regularly gutted by shack fires that sweep through the area: during the qualitative research for the study, the media reported no fewer than six fires over a six-month period, destroying hundreds of shacks. The cousin's shack, in which they were all living, burned down in the first year that they lived together. Lindiwe, together with her daughter, mother, and younger sister moved into a new shack together, which burned down the following year. It is impossible to get insurance against shack fires, and even the stokvels (group savings schemes) do not cover this kind of risk. Every time there was a fire, the family had to start building and furnishing a new home from scratch.

After the second fire, Lindiwe and her mother built separate shacks, and Sipho (now aged six) came to live in Cape Town. There were two main reasons for Sipho's move. First, he was due to start Grade 1 the following year and Lindiwe wanted him to benefit from the better schooling available in Cape Town. Second, Lindiwe had finally managed to get a job as a domestic worker and, although she only worked two days a week and was earning very little, at least her income was stable. She had always intended to have both her children with her in Cape Town once she got a job.

The siblings Sipho and Asanda were now living together for the first time, but they stayed with their grandmother Noluthando in her shack, while Lindiwe stayed in a separate shack. Lindiwe described this diversification of the family dwellings as a form of insurance against fire. Having a second shack at a slight distance meant there was a lockable space to store the contents of one shack if it was under threat of fire and, provided one of the shacks survived, there would still be shelter for the family in the aftermath of a fire. The distance between the shacks was therefore an important consideration: they needed to be close enough for family life to continue but far enough to have a chance of one shack surviving a fire if the other was burned. Although they operated as a single household, this configuration would defy all efforts to construct such a household from survey data. They regarded themselves as a family, shared resources, and ate their meals together (all common requirements for defining members of the same household), but lived on different sites, which would be sampled separately. In a survey, they would appear as two distinct households: a single-adult household, and a skip-generation household where two children have an absent mother.

Lindiwe continued to support the children and her mother, buying all their food and other necessities. In 2006 she got a second domestic job and was working full-time. She supported the whole family, including her younger brother who was finishing high school, and her sister who was unemployed and living with her boyfriend. In 2008, Noluthando's shack burned down, but in 2010, partly through her involvement in local politics and her contacts, Noluthando fast-tracked her way up a waiting list and secured a state-provided formal house. However, she only stayed in the house with her two grandchildren for one year.

Her whole family had now moved away from the Eastern Cape, and the homestead there was locked up and empty. Their house had been broken into numerous times, and their possessions stolen. Noluthando moved back to the Eastern Cape partly because of concerns about their rural home, but also because she felt she had achieved her purpose in Cape Town, which was to ensure that her children could sustain themselves and the next generation.

When Noluthando left, Lindiwe moved into the formal house and lived with her children. Lindiwe was 32 years old, Asanda was 17, and Sipho was 12. It was the first time the three of them had lived together in the same home since Sipho had been born.

We did a return trip to Lindiwe's rural home at the end of 2015 and another in December 2016. Lindiwe regards her rural home as her main home, the place where she is rooted and with which she maintains a connection. She remits money regularly to her mother and has also invested in building a house on the rural homestead. She explained that she had spent so much time at her childhood home: she was there all the time, and never went anywhere during the school holidays. She distinguished between being a resident and being a citizen, using those English words. In Cape Town she was a resident. She had a house there, a job, and a daily life. But in the Eastern Cape she was a citizen. This was her true home.

Lindiwe expects to be buried in her home village, although she is not sure whether she would retire there. One of the challenges over the course of our interviews was to try to determine whether she would be classified as a 'permanent' or 'temporary' migrant. Through the research it became apparent that these categories are not easily definable; that adult migrants may themselves vacillate between a sense of temporary and permanent status in the city.

But she does not imagine that her children will ever want to live permanently at the rural home, suggesting a generational shift in attachment to the rural home, and therefore also in circular migration—the strength of the ties depends on where one grew up.

7   Discussion and conclusion

The reality of family and household form in South Africa is that neither households nor families have fixed boundaries; both extend over geographic space and degrees of kin, both are multi-generational and porous, shifting rather than static, and there are possibilities for overlaps and duplication in that many people may belong to more than one household, just as kinship ties connect multiple families in complex ways. The terms 'household' and 'family' are often used interchangeably, even in academic discourse that is specifically about households and families (Amoateng and Heaton 2007; Russell 2003a). The distinction is particularly complicated in the South African context, where family members who are immediately related by blood and marriage often spend much of their time living apart, while extended household arrangements, combined with a range of individual and household strategies such as labour migration, urbanization, and the

allocation of care roles, create ties of co-residence between members who are less closely related by blood or marriage.

Surveys have only limited ability to portray the complexity of households and family structures, and they offer at most partial insights into family and social networks beyond the household. But national household surveys are indispensable for describing broad national patterns and trends that cannot be captured through smaller surveys or more nuanced qualitative work. The availability of a national longitudinal survey in South Africa, which adopts a broad definition of the household, adds to our ability to describe family networks that extend beyond a co-residential unit. The emphasis in the survey on following individuals rather than households over time is also important because it acknowledges and caters for the fluidity of people in and out of households.

The quantitative data describe high rates of parental absence from children's households, which is mostly not accounted for by parental death. Many parents who live apart from their children remain in contact, and particularly if they are still regarded as a member (if non-resident) of the child's household. These patterns suggest that parents and children continue to be separated through processes of migration; but a child lens reveals that this is not only because of adult migration but also because of mobility among children. Among a cohort of children under eight years old at baseline in 2008, 14 per cent had migrated across municipal boundaries at least once by 2014. Child migration is clearly associated with maternal migration. However, although children whose mothers had migrated during the panel were far more likely to move than those whose mothers had not migrated, a sizeable share of children did not migrate with, or join, their mothers.

The qualitative study enhances the quantitative results in a number of ways. It affirms and provides context for the patterns observed in the national data: that children mostly live with mothers, but a substantial share do not; that fathers rarely feature, but that grandmothers and extended family play a crucial role in providing childcare; that women carry an enormous financial burden and may be forced to migrate without their children. It also demonstrates the complexity of household strategies and plans for childcare in the context of female labour migration. In the case study, children's migration is deliberate and strategic but it is also strongly influenced by circumstance; for example, it may happen at different times for siblings depending on the available care arrangements and on their life stage and school readiness; it may be delayed far longer than planned, or happen prematurely, before the hoped-for living conditions are in place. Qualitative research can capture, in ways that surveys do not, the plans and aspirations of families and how these are modified over time as circumstances change—or fail to change in anticipated ways. For example, despite her desire to be with her children, the central character, a migrant mother, fails to have them living with her for much of their childhood, even after they migrate to the same place.

The case study illustrates the fluidity of household form and household relationships. It describes a rural household that grew as it accommodated dependants, shrank as potential breadwinners were dispatched, grew again as it took in the next generation of children, and shrank again as adult members died or followed the urban pioneers to seek work, or when children went off to school. Throughout all these changes there was a sense that people's places were held in the imagination of the household, although the 'full' household was seldom, if ever, convened, not even at Christmas time. These descriptions differ in tone from the fluidity described elsewhere, for it is not an easy flow between open doors but rather a series of difficult transitions in which households gamble on expensive routes, uncertain work opportunities and housing arrangements at the urban end, and an endless struggle for income to support dual and sometimes multiple households. Decisions about childcare are made in the context of these broader household strategies.

The focus on a single migrant and her family made it possible to trace the connectedness of the rural and urban homes, which are part of the same 'single social field' (Trager 1991: vii). The multiple and multi-directional moves between rural and urban areas illustrate the stepwise migration of children in relation to their mother, as well as other forms of mobility. There are large moves across provinces, but also small moves as the family rebuilds destroyed shacks, reconfigures itself into separate households, and then reunites in a formal house. Not all these moves would be captured as geographic migration or even mobility across place. Including the extended family highlights processes of cumulative causation and chain migration, as successive members provided the next in-migrants with accommodation when they arrive in the city.

The qualitative research also describes child immobility in contexts where mothers move, demonstrating the inability of a mother to take her children with her to the city. Involuntary immobility was, in effect, legislated under apartheid, but it persists in the post-apartheid period through a combination of unemployment, poverty, and unsuitable living arrangements at the destination area. The concept of immobility can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of household migration strategies and challenge what is often a morally tinged critique of continuing family fragmentation in the post-apartheid era. Migration is not arbitrary: it uses resources and is the outcome of decisions made at individual and household levels. This suggests that what might be termed family fragmentation can be a household strategy, the product of childcare choices made in the context of external forces and structural constraints.

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