

# Concerns and intentions of young migrants in the shoe-shine business in the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the concerns and intentions among young migrants engaged in the “shoe-shine” business in the Cape Coast Metropolis. Through snowball sampling, 191 responded to a questionnaire while 15 participated in in-depth interviews. The data were analysed using logistic regression and content analysis. The main concerns were injuries, physical stress, poor accommodation and exposure to thieves. Consequently, most of them intend to quit the job in future due to physical stress, aging, declining earnings and inability to combine the job with farming at their places of origin. The shoe-shine boys who wish to remain in the job need to team up to address some of the challenges they face. However, there is the need for government to involve them in the National Youth Employment programme to train them for more sustainable jobs in the future.

**Keywords:** Migrants, shoe-shine business, intentions to quit, Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana

## INTRODUCTION

It has been estimated that a third of the world’s migrants’ population are young people and that unemployment among them is three times higher than the adult population (World Bank, 2013; Rakauskienė and Ranceva, 2014). In sub-Saharan Africa, it has been observed that the causes of the rising levels of unemployment among young people include rapid population growth, limited job opportunities in the formal sector and the fact that agriculture is no longer attractive to most young people (White, 2012; World Bank, 2012; Gough et al., 2013). Consequently, migration from rural to urban areas has become the only option for some of them who either seek for jobs in the informal sector or create their own jobs such as the shoe-shine business. In Ghana, the shoe-shine business has existed in the country for decades but has attracted little or no research over the years. This paper which focuses on the shoe-shine business in the Cape Coast Metropolis, examines their concerns and future intentions in the business.

### The shoe-shine business

In Ghana, a shoe-shine boy (most common name) is usually a young male aged mostly below 30 years who moves about or stays at one particular place and polishes and/or mends shoes for some payment. A shoe-shine boy normally carries a wooden box containing all the necessary accoutrements and moves about advertising his trade/presence by occasionally knocking on the wooden box to attract customers. They work almost every day of the week. A typical day’s activity of a shoe-shine boy begins at about 6:00 a.m. through the afternoon to about 6:00 p.m. depending on the availability of customers (Personal communication, 2015). This study focuses on the mobile shoe-shine operators who are mostly migrants and also constitute the majority in the Cape Coast Metropolis.

### Study site, data and sources

The Cape Coast Metropolis is the capital of the Central Region of Ghana and the first national capital of the Gold Coast, now Ghana (Fig. 1). Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from the shoe-shine boys using snowball and random sampling procedures. In all, 191 and 15 respondents were interviewed using survey questionnaire and in-depth interview guide respectively. Both descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used to analyse the quantitative data while the qualitative data were analysed using content analysis.

## Results and Discussion

### Background characteristics

The respondents were mostly single and aged between 20 and 29 years. More than three-quarters were basic school graduates (Primary and Middle/Junior High School (JHS) and most of them belonged to the Akan ethnic group (80.2%).

### Concerns about their jobs

Four main concerns were reported by the shoe-shine boys which bordered on their places of origin and destination (Table 1). These were health (36.5%), effects of being absent from places of origin (34.7%), economic (17.8%), and accommodation challenges at destination (11.0%). Specifically, it was observed that diseases (64.2%) at the destination, inability to remit home

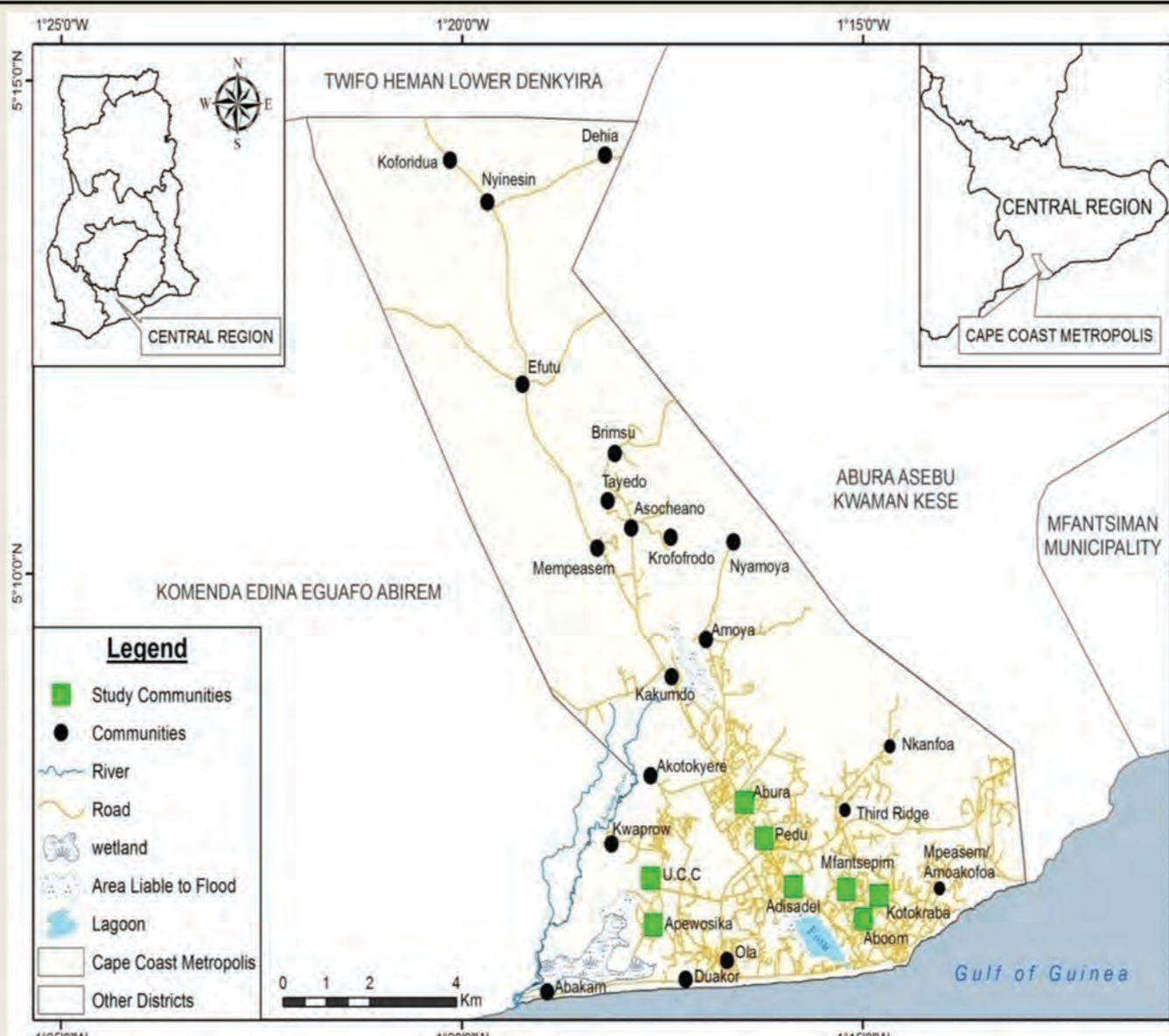


Fig. 1: Map of the Cape Coast Metropolis showing the study sites  
Source: Remote Sensing and Cartographic Unit of the Dept. of Geography and Regional Planning, University of Cape Coast. Cape.

(60.8%), and the limited size of their sleeping rooms were major worries to the respondents. They also lamented that their absence from their places of origin had affected output in farming (49.3%) and security of their households (5.5%).

Concerns	N	Sub (%)	Total (%)
<b>Economic factors</b>	102		17.8
Job not lucrative	40	39.2	
Inability to remit home	62	60.8	
<b>Accommodation challenges</b>	63		11.0
Rooms are small in size	37	58.8	
Rooms are too expensive	26	41.2	
<b>Health</b>	209		36.5
Diseases (eg. Malaria, Cholera)	134	64.2	
Job is stressful	75	35.8	
<b>Effect back home</b>	199		34.7
My absence has affected security at home	11	5.5	
My absence has affected output in farming	98	49.3	
My absence has affected household chores	90	45.2	

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

The key issues mentioned in the qualitative interviews were injuries, poor accommodation, exposure to thieves, physical stress and implications of being absent from their places of origin due to the business. The injuries were caused by the needles they used:

*I pierced my thigh with a needle about three years ago. It got so stuck and when I tried to pull it out some of my flesh tried coming out. My thigh was swollen and it caused me so much pains. My friend carried me to the hospital in the night since it was late. The needle was pulled out the following day. I suffered for two months without working (28 years, Single, JHS).*

Poor accommodation was also mentioned as one of their concerns: *I sleep on a Veranda in front of a store. Anytime it rains in the night, I become very sad because I have to stand until the rain stops. Even after the rain had stopped, we had to mop the floor before we could put our mats back on the floor to sleep. We often get malaria because of exposure to mosquitoes (28 years, Married, JHS).* The nature of their sleeping places also expose them to thieves and other criminals as reported in this excerpt: *They monitor us and come at night to steal because they know we work during the day and we have money on us (31 years, Single, JHS).*

Some of the respondents also complained of physical stress: *The aspect of my work that is more tedious is walking from one place to the other (38 years, Married, JHS)....I cannot be a shoe-shine boy forever. As I grow old, walking will become a problem and you know we walk a lot in this job(31 years, Single, JHS).*

Some of them do the business at the expense of their other roles at their places of origin: *I came from AF to work in order to save enough money to maintain my oil palm and cocoa farms but now my farms are all bushy because I can no longer afford the high cost of hiring these labourers(26 years, Single, JHS).I think my absence from my place of origin is a contributing factor to my daughter’s pregnancy. This would not have happened if I were living with them (38 years, Married, JHS).*

### Influence of shoe-shine boys’ concerns on their intentions to quit the job

The estimated logit model showed that about 29 percent of quit intention is explained by the concerns raised (Table 2). Though the variables used were not able to explain most of the variance of the regress and, they were highly significant at 0.01 levels. The P value of the Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficient is less than 0.05 which suggests that the model is a reliable predictor (Pallant, 2005; Adongo, Anuga and Dayour, 2015). This was further confirmed by the Hosmer and Lemeshow Test score ( $\chi^2 = 3.421$ ;  $P = 0.2531$ ). Three out of the nine variables were found to be significant to the model. Stress emerged as the greatest predictor. Those who considered the job stressful were by a factor of 7.855 times more likely to quit. Another factor that was more likely to influence respondents’ intention to quit was the lucrativeness of the job (odds = 2.157). This implies that the less lucrative a job is, the likelihood of quitting is 2.157 which is consistent with the literature (Masroor and Fakir, 2010). Respondents who also felt that their absence had affected their farm output at their places of origin were about 5.435 times likely to leave the job.

**Table 2: Influence of shoe-shine boys’ concerns on their intentions to quit the job**

Concerns	Odds ratio	Z	P value
<b>Economic factors</b>			
Job not lucrative	2.157	2.20	0.028*
Inability to remit home	0.693	0.41	0.679
<b>Accommodation challenges</b>			
Rooms are small in size	0.760	-0.23	0.819
Rooms are too expensive	1.117	0.08	0.933
<b>Health</b>			
Diseases (eg. Malaria, Cholera)	0.626	0.33	0.741
Job is stressful	7.855	1.97	0.049*
<b>Effects back home</b>			
My absence has affected security at home	0.798	0.23	0.820
My absence has affected output in farming	5.435	2.88	0.000**
My absence has affected household chores	0.438	-0.83	0.409

Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> = 0.286;; P= 0.000 ; P≤ 0.05 \* ; P < 0.01\*\*

### Future intentions in the shoe-shine business

The qualitative results showed that most of them had planned to quit the business for the following reasons: to look for more lucrative and stable jobs, to move into their chosen profession, and aging while a few of them said they would remain in the business because opportunities for alternative jobs are limited. The excerpts are as follows:

*My intention is to save enough money, stop the shoe-shine business and settle at AF and establish a mechanic shop (28 years, Single, JHS). As I grow old, walking becomes a problem and you know we walk a lot in this job (31 years, Single, JHS).*

*This is not the job I am trained to do, I am a driver and as soon as I get money for my license, I will quit this job (28 years, Single, JHS).*

## Conclusion

The results revealed that their main concerns ranged from injuries from the work, poor accommodation through physical stress to the neglect of their other responsibilities at their places of origin. Most of them intend to quit the job for more lucrative and stable jobs. The shoe-shine business is a stepping stone to more lucrative jobs.