

A Study on the Lifestyles and Daily Activities of Informal Settlers in Inner Kabul City

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1 ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the lifestyle and daily activities of informal settlers in Kabul City. It begins with a review of relevant literature on the conceptualization of informal settlements as is popularly understood in Afghan's context. Primary data on informal settlers' living styles and daily activities was generated from interviews with 153 families residing in 86 houses in District Seven of Kabul. The data were analysed considering such households' characteristics as gender, affiliation (i.e. employment) and literacy. The results show that a typical dwelling unit within this informal settlement comprises multi-generational family members. Notably, men were found to be more active in daily activities than women. Similarly, literacy and affiliation were found to be important determinants of the kinds of activities that individuals in the study location engaged in.

2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Kabul City has witnessed an extraordinary population explosion in recent years. The major drivers of this growth is cityward migration of refugees fleeing from insecurity in the hinterlands. The step-wise nature of these refugees' movement has been a major factor contributing to the proliferation of informal settlements in Kabul City. The city's population grew from 2 million in 2000 to an estimated 5 million in 2015, indicating a hundred and fifty percent increase within 15 years. Informal settlements accommodate about 74% of this population and cover 76% of the city's residential land (JICA, 2011a) (Fig.1). Regularizing or formalizing this vast mass of land has been a huge challenge and a top priority for the Afghan government. Consequently, various initiatives, including surveys and feasibility studies have been conducted with a view to exploring measures to address this challenge. However, these initiatives have mainly focused on built environment and physical elements in the urban context. However, in conceptualizing and planning a framework for the development of informal settlements, the social aspects such as residents' lifestyle, preferences and activities are just as important as the physical aspects, but for too long the social aspects have not received adequate attention from policy makers and development planners. According to Horgas, Wilms & Baltes (1998), activities are not only an expression of needs, preferences, and motivations, but also reflect external constraints and opportunities and the meaning attached to activities vary from one person to another depending on such characteristics as age, gender and education.

In view of the above, this paper examines the living style and daily activities of settlers in District Seven of Kabul because 95 percent of the area possess the characteristics of informal settlements. For this purpose, first, we present a review of the relevant literature on the conceptualization of informal settlements as is popularly understood in Afghan's context. Second, we present the primary data on informal settlers' lifestyles and daily activities, which were generated from interviews with 153 families, that resided in 86 houses and concentrated in an area of 4.3 km² in the central part of District Seven. Third, we analyse the data considering such households' characteristics as gender, affiliation and literacy.

The paper draws inspiration from Clarence Perry's (1929) contention that the siting of neighbourhood unit facilities and street design should be premised on people's lifestyles and activities. This research takes the debate further by proposing that a neighbourhood unit framework should also be adopted in Kabul city. The paper proceeds by first re-examining Perry's neighbourhood unit in the context of Kabul, following initial macro surveys of the traditional neighbourhoods called "Gozar" (Sahab & Kaneda, 2015; Sahab, Meziani & Kaneda, 2014). The results from those surveys suggested that Gozars with informal settlements score less in some social and physical neighbourhood functions. Therefore, we concentrated our research on informal settlements and decided to conduct micro surveys of informal settlers.

Studying people's daily activities has a long history in urban, geographical, social and psychological studies (i.e. Perry, 1929; Chapin, 1974; Altergott, 1989; Hanson & Hanson 1993). In the urban context, according to Hanson & Hanson (1993), activity studies enable urban planners to address the nature, the spatial extent and

the diversity of people’s activity patterns and how these patterns of particular social groups are different from one another. Chapin (1974) believes that such studies would be particularly valuable for urban planners as they sought, through intervening in the built environment, to improve the quality of life.

Although the study of people’s lifestyles and daily activities have received considerable attention over the years in the developed countries, such studies have been comparatively scarce amid data reliability challenges in developing countries such as Afghanistan. However, just as there are differences relating to how and which activities are undertaken by different groups of people based on ages, affiliation and so on, so are there also differences in lifestyles and traditions across countries and regions. Therefore, studies such as this are highly anticipated in Kabul city to provide systematic frameworks upon which development and spatial planning of informal settlements can be predicated.

3 INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN KABUL

Informal settlements is a global urban phenomenon but mostly occurring in developing countries. They exist in various forms and typologies, dimensions, locations and by a range of names (UN-Habitat, 2015a). Although there are some common factors behind their emergence and growth, the amount of effect that each factor can have is different across regions. In Kabul city, the most compelling factor that led to the growth of informal settlements has been the inability of the formal sector to provide the public with a range of affordable housing options. (Gebremedhin, 2005; UN-Habitat, 2015c)

Furthermore, a review of the literature on informal settlements reveals that there are similarities between the definitions which are juridical and those focusing on illegality of the informal settlements. For example in Kabul’s context, according to Gebremedhin (2005); JICA (2011a); UN-Habitat (2015c) and; AKTC (2011), informal settlements are settlements that are: (a) constructed in violation of the Kabul City Master Plan, zoning codes and regulations; (b) illegally occupying land, without having a rightful title to it.

Informal settlements are distinguishable from formal settlements by their social and physical features. From the physical point of view, while the majority of informal settlements lack basic infrastructure, in contrast to other cities, the houses in Kabul City are made of durable materials to provide adequate and permanent shelter to their inhabitants. Furthermore, the plot sizes in informal settlements are not smaller than in formal settlements and in many cases are even larger (Bertaud, 2005)

From the social point of view, comparing the neighbourhood functions of formal and informal settlements, some functions such as governance and crime prevention measures work better in formal settlements. However, such functions as mutual aid and maintenance of the neighbourhood facilities work well both in formal and informal settlements (Sahab & Kaneda, 2015)

Taking these into account, eradication of informal settlements and redeveloping to formal settlements is not an option, first because of the limited financial resources to redevelop this vast mass of land (76% of city’s residential land) (JICA, 2011a; UN-Habitat, 2015b; Bertaud, 2005); second, the construction of permanent houses built mostly by labourers who had no alternative employment opportunities has contributed to the growth of fixed capital in the city and constitute an important asset rather than a liability. (Bertaud, 2005)

Therefore, the best way forward is in-situ upgrading with citizen participation (UN-Habitat, 2015b; JICA, 2011a; Bertaud 2005). The upgrading strategies should not focus only on the current physical needs of the informal settlers, but it should also take into account the social upgrading of the settlers such as rising literacy rates, women capacity, employment opportunities, etc. in the long term. These need to be first examined through some social surveys, which is the main aim of this research.

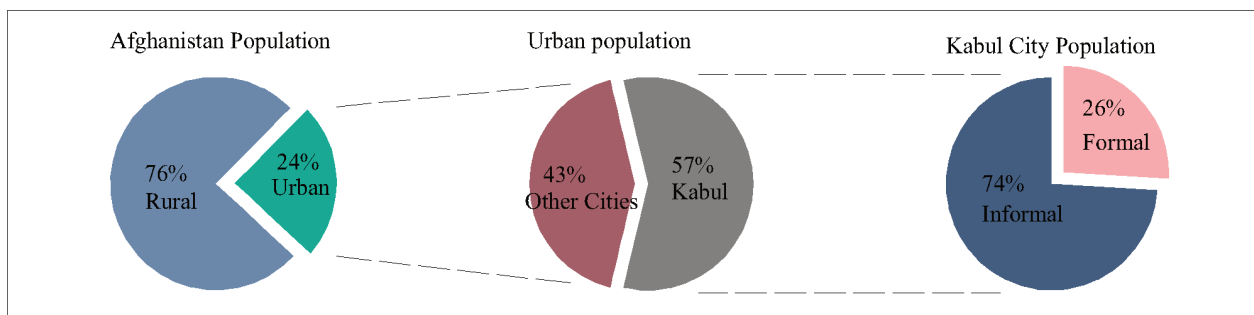


Fig. 1: The distribution of urban population in Afghanistan

4 SOCIAL SURVEY OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN DISTRICT SEVEN OF KABUL

To examine the lifestyles and daily activities of informal settlers, during August and September 2015, we conducted a survey in District 7 (a district is a municipal ward in Kabul City). This district was chosen because it is located in the southwestern part of Kabul City where informal settlements are heavily concentrated. The district is also a fast developing area with 45% new habitats and with more than 95% of the urbanised area being informal (JICA, 2011b). For ease of access and the security situation, we selected an area of about 4.3km² in this district and 1 to 3 houses were randomly surveyed from each alley (narrow streets in the informal areas). Data collection method was through schedule (The researcher filled out the questionnaires by asking questions from the residents). The heads of the selected houses and other family members were asked both general questions and questions specific to the daily activities that they engage in.

The Questionnaire included questions on demography, daily activities and social relations, which constitute the main issues investigated in this study. A total of 86 houses, which accommodates a total of 177 families were surveyed. From those, 153 families and 800 individuals provided valid data that were analysed and presented here. The details of the sample breakdown are captured in Fig. 2 below:

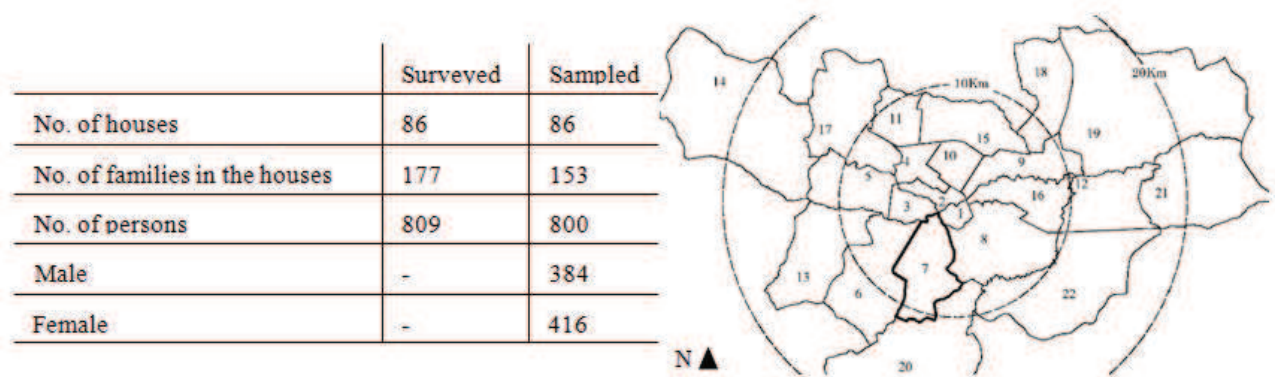


Fig. 2 Sampling statistics and surveyed district

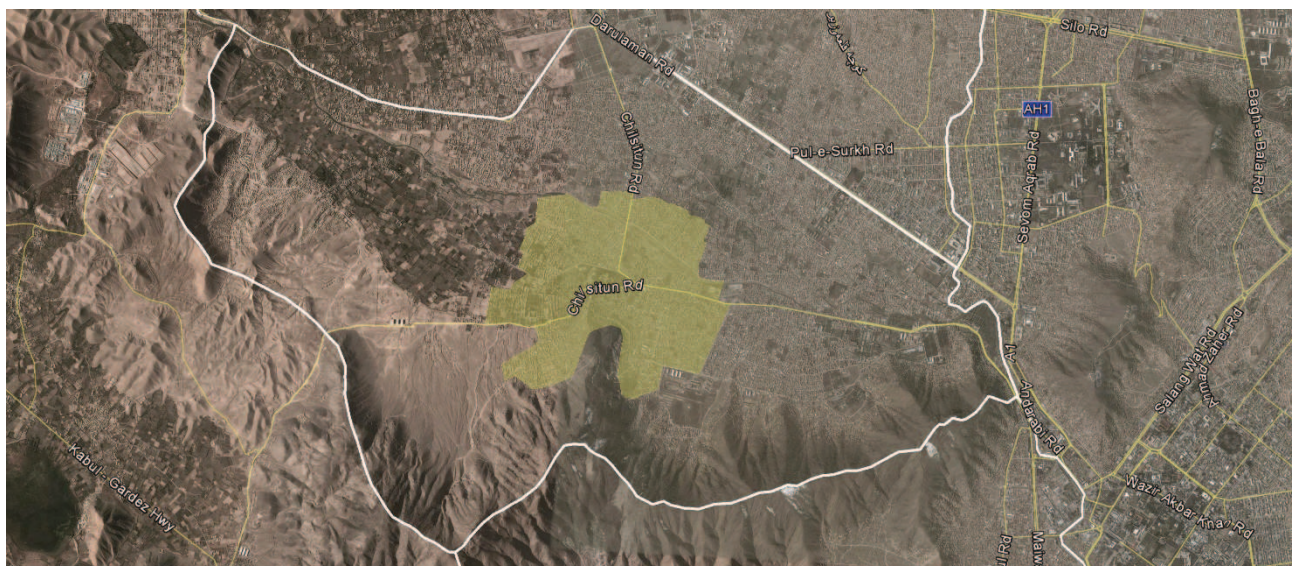


Fig. 3: The location of the surveyed area in District 7

5 LIVING STYLE AND DAILY ACTIVITIES OF INFORMAL SETTLERS ASCERTAINED THROUGH SURVEY

5.1 House and Family Sizes

To develop any framework for upgrading informal settlements, the primary and perhaps the most essential data needed is the measures of population densities and family structures. Therefore, one of the main purposes of our survey was to investigate the family sizes and structures in the housing units of informal settlements.

The survey findings are shown in Fig. 4 below. As could be seen, in more than half of the houses (56.98%), multiple families, comprising mainly relatives are living together. Questions relating to the duration of stay in the houses show that the families have lived in there for a relatively long time, with the average being 25 years. Even though some of their children born in these houses have grown and married, they still live in there with their spouses. The predominant pattern is that each newly wedded couple still maintain their link with their family houses by extending such buildings which suggests that multi-generations co-exist in multiple families within the houses.

The range of house and family sizes are shown in Fig. 4 below. Accordingly, the figures suggest that single person houses are unlikely. The family sizes ranges from 2 to 10 members, and the average size is 5.27. In sum, the results suggest that an average of 9.38 persons live in a house.

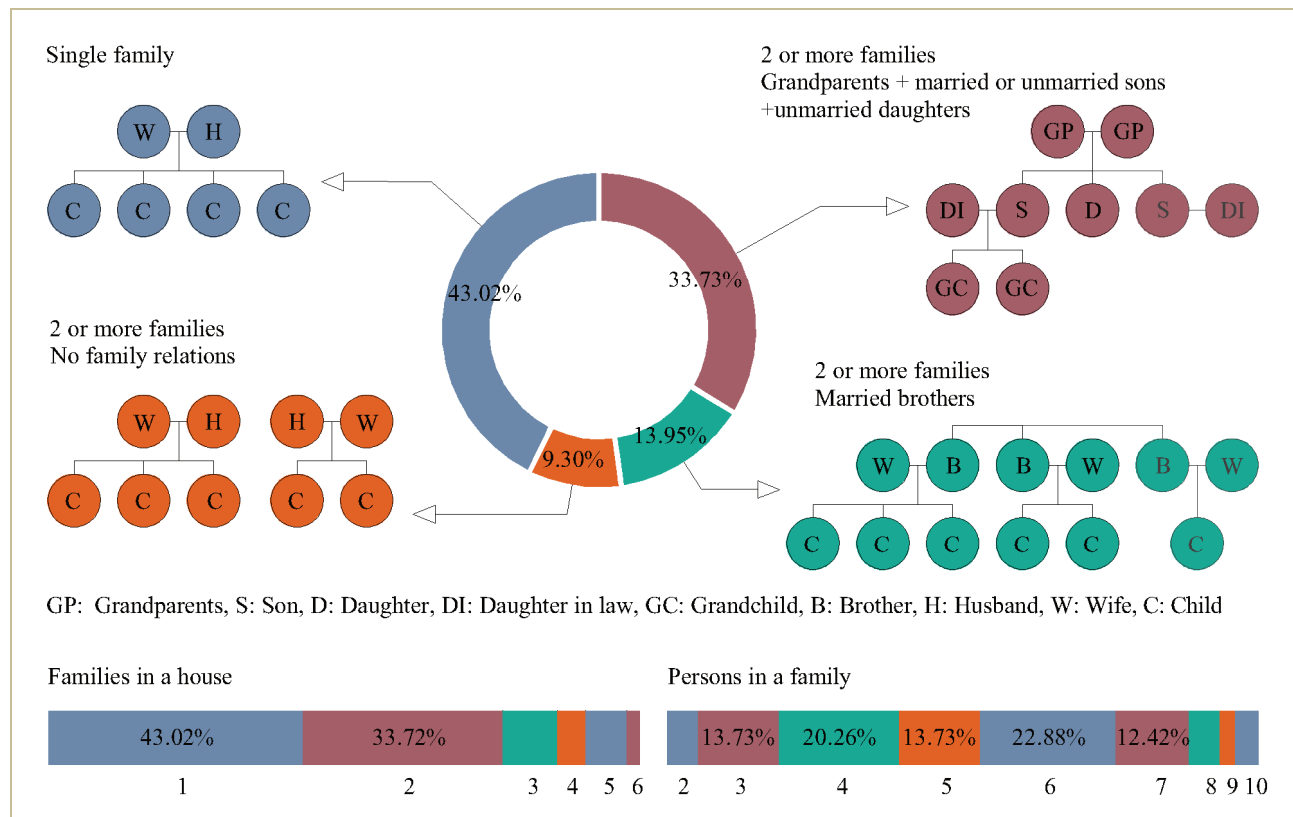


Fig. 4: The Characteristics of Families in the Sampled Houses (n=86)

5.2 Daily Activities

As mentioned before, the motivation behind this research was to understand people’s actual daily activities, so as to be able to propose appropriate frameworks for developing informal settlements in Kabul City. This is because by understanding the current activities of informal settlements, the social and physical needs and preferences of the people can be more appropriately addressed, and long-term goals of improving social capacities among others can be set. To achieve this goal, the residents were asked about the most frequent activities or routines that they engage in during the days of a week. The frequencies of their engagements in these activities were counted in terms of the number of trips from the house to the specific destinations (one-way trip from the houses). Questions related to the places of work and studies were also asked to enable us to measure the distances using measuring tools on the map. From the findings of the survey, we produced a diagram (Fig. 5) that shows the average distances and the frequency of trips per person per week. However, we could not cover the distances to shops, mosques and garbage disposal places through the interviews. Therefore, we measured them using the physical maps of the area.

As could be seen in the diagram, the frequency of trips to mosque is the highest and the distance to university is the farthest. Although this is not true for all the trips, it seems that there is an inverse relationship between frequency and distance—the higher the frequency, the nearer the distance.

For some of the activities such as going to school, university, or work, we can hypothesize the characteristics of these actors. However, for some activities such as going to mosque, shops and disposing garbage, it is

rather difficult to deduce the characteristics of the actors, since this might take on such characteristics as gender and/or age. To further probe these aspects of daily routines, questions that disaggregates such characteristics were included in the interviews. The results constitute the main body of the next section.

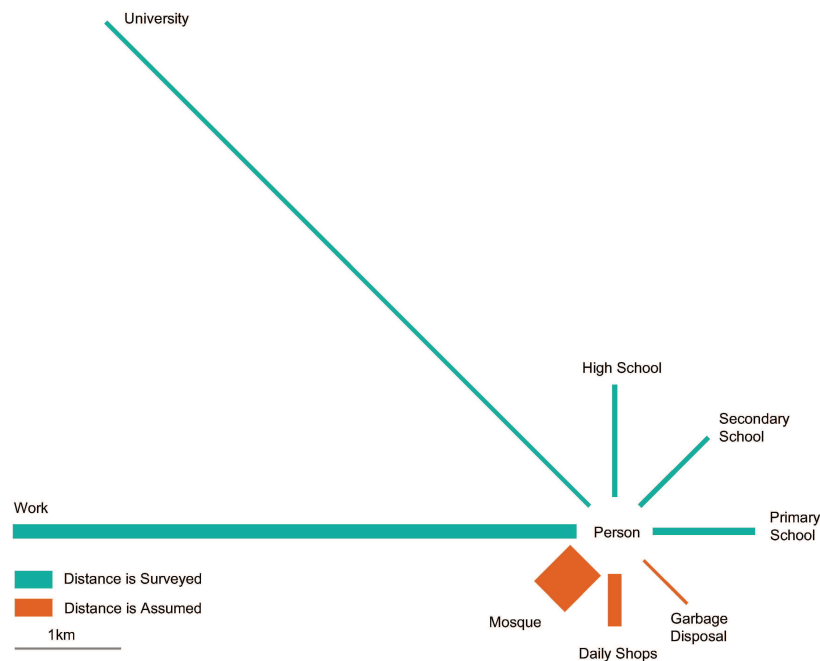


Fig. 5. Average distances (line measure) and frequency of trips (line thickness) in a week per person

6 ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERISTICS AFFECTING DAILY ACTIVITIES

To analyse the characteristics which might affect engagements in daily activities, we compiled a list of characteristics and activities. Such characteristics included age, gender, affiliation, and literacy, while the activities included going to mosque, shopping and garbage disposal. Since going to school and to work were included in ‘affiliation’, we decided to exclude them from the activities. The assumed relationships are shown in fig. 6.

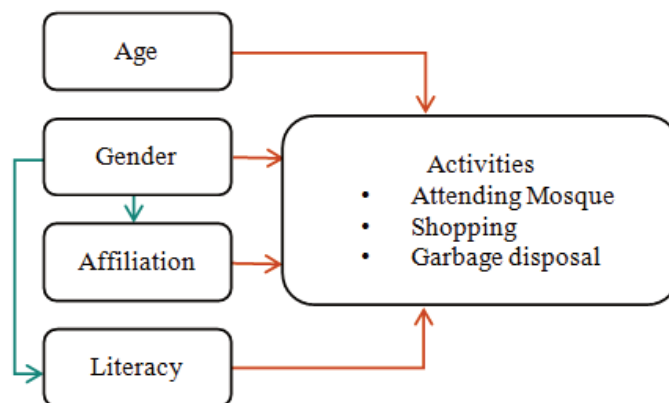


Fig. 6: Characteristics affecting daily activities

6.1 Age:

To examine age-related differences in the daily activities, we categorized our sampled individuals into seven age groups (7-14, 15-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65+). As could be seen, younger age brackets were omitted since there was usually no activity for them. Fig. 7 show the weekly frequency of trips for each group.

In figure 7(a), it could be seen that the frequency of trips per person is the highest in 15-24 ages, this is because the number of persons in this age is the highest (n=233). This helps to understand the majority of users of a facility. However, to know which age group is more active, there is a need to ascertain the

frequency of trips for each age group per number of persons in that group as shown in figure 7(b). The evidence suggests that the most active groups in terms of going to mosque is age 55-64 and 65+.

On the characteristics of the people going to shops, the most active groups were 45-54, 35-44 and 25-34. Although the frequency of trips to shops are less in comparison to the above-mentioned active groups, ages 7-14 also frequently go to shops. This is because young ones often go to nearby shops during the day when the adult have gone to work.

Garbage is mostly disposed by ages 15-24. However, slight differences can be observed between all the age groups. It should not go without saying that in 23.53% of the surveyed houses garbage is collected by waste collectors, which are not included in the above results. The waste collectors are either from the municipality or from low income people who are paid by the residents.

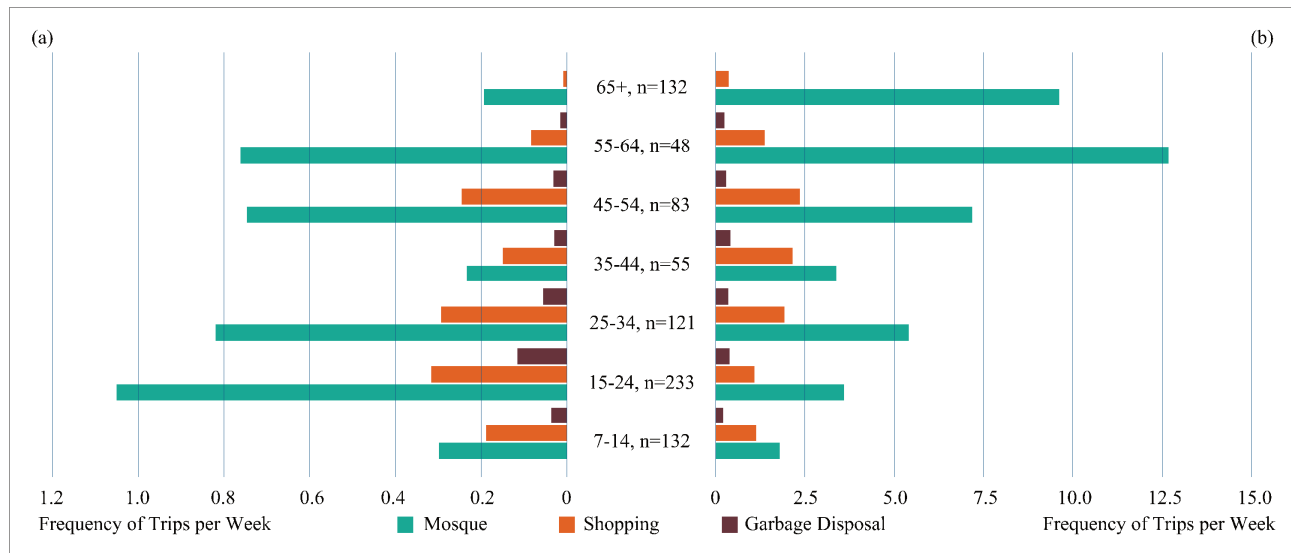


Fig. 7: Frequency of trips in a week (a) per person (b) per number of persons in each group

6.2 Gender

There were 416 females and 384 males in our sampled houses. To ascertain the differences between males and females, there was a need to investigate the frequency of trips undertaken by males and females per number of male and female groups in a week. This data is captured in figure 8. Accordingly, male groups were found to be likely more active in all the three activities.

In comparison to other activities undertaken by females, the only activity where they featured somewhat more was shopping, although this is also not comparable to male groups. Furthermore, we recorded no trips to mosque, and only few trips for garbage.

While Gender differences exist in varying degrees across all countries of the world, the situation of Afghan women particularly leaves much to be desired. Notably, women who do not go out of their residence are usually responsible for household chores such as cooking, washing, cleaning, grooming, fostering and so forth. However, this study does not focus on gender inequality per se, but tries to generate data upon which a systematic framework for developing urban environments can be based.

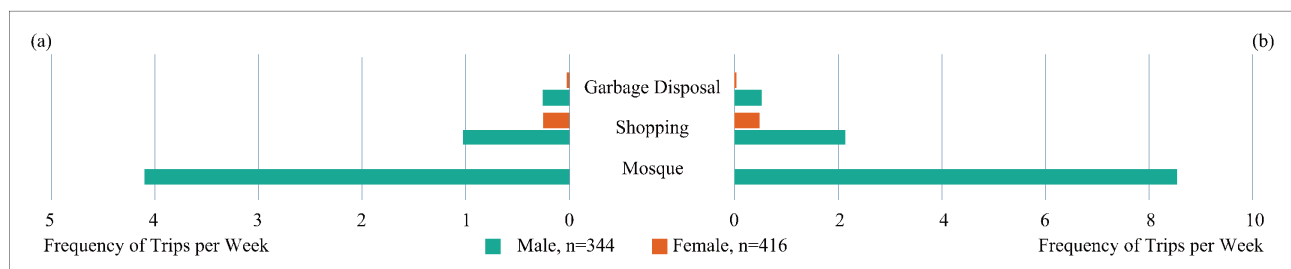


Fig. 8: Gender distribution of the number of trips undertaken in a week (a) per person (b) per number of persons in each group

6.3 Affiliation

To examine affiliation related differences in the daily activities, the sample was categorized into five groups comprising school students, university students, the employed, unemployed and retired ones. We excluded the kids (age 0-5) and the school age children, who were not attending school because we had recorded no activities from them. Looking at the frequency of trips per person in figure 9(a) below, it could be seen that the employed group recorded the highest frequency of trips, while after them, school students dominated shopping-related trips. Furthermore, to investigate the frequency of being active among the groups, we refer to Figure 9(b) which shows the frequency of trips per number of persons in each group. Thus, it could be seen that with as regard going to mosque, the retired group led the pack. The data also show that the employed group was likely more active than the unemployed just as school students were more active than university students, except with respect to going to mosque.

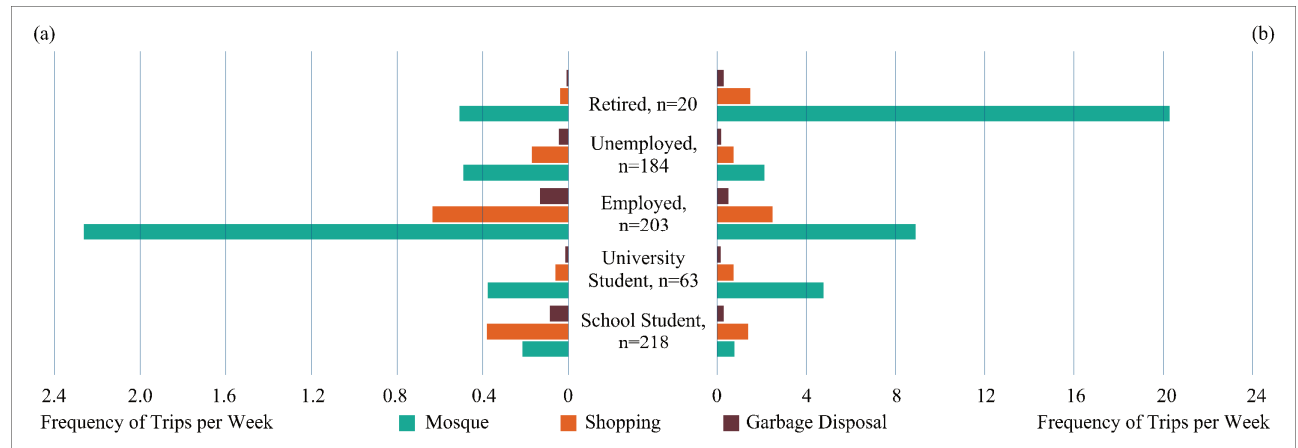


Figure 9: Frequency of trips by people with different affiliations in a week (a) per person, (b) per number of persons in each group

6.4 Literacy

To help us ascertain how literacy affects engagements in daily activities, questions on individual's level of education were included in the interview. The sample was then divided into literate and non-literate respondents according to various levels of educational attainments (Fig. 10). Accordingly, 82.86% of the people in our sampled houses were literate and 17.14% were non-literate. However, these figures might be different from the related statistical data in other reports due to the difference between definition of the term and the measurement tools used.

Regarding the daily activities, figure 10 shows that literate people are likely more active in all three activities done during a week.

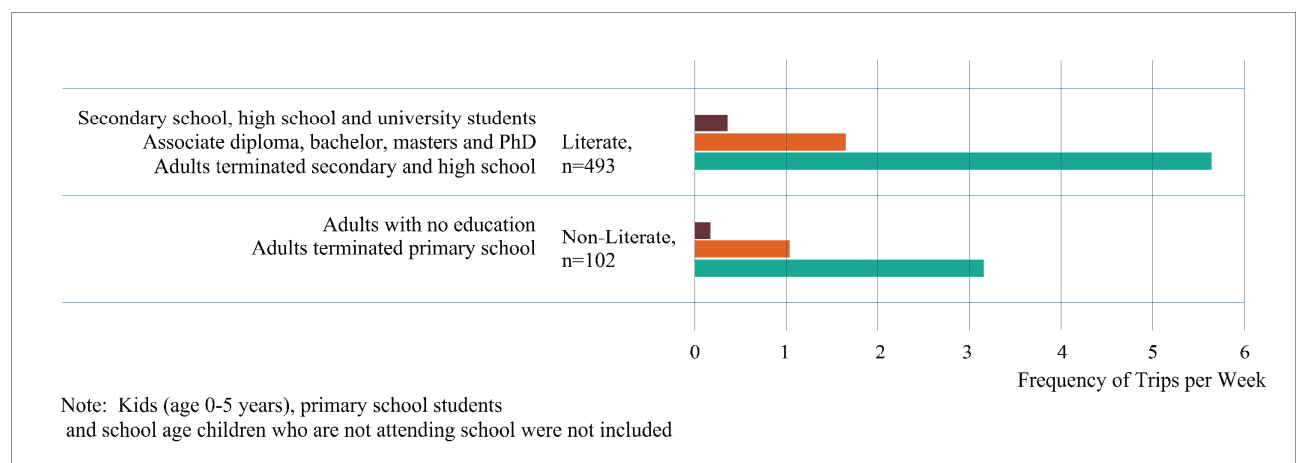


Fig. 10: Frequency of trips in a week per number of literate and non-literate persons

7 CONCLUSION

This paper sets out to provide a clear picture of the composition of families and the daily activities of the informal settlers in Kabul City. To this end, (1) a detailed profile of the families showing number of families

in the houses, family sizes and family structures were presented; (2) an explicit layout of the most common daily activities were examined; (3) how the activities engaged in by the respondents relate to such characteristics as age, gender and affiliation were presented.

With respect to the composition of the family, our survey showed that in more than half of the houses, multiple families co-exist but are usually part of a larger family that includes multiple generations of grandparents, parents and their children. While this practice might be linked to Afghan tradition, it is also a strategy adopted by the respondents to cope with housing challenges induced by population explosion and the attendant rising cost of living in more formal settlements of the city. Therefore, it is envisaged that apart from planning for facility and infrastructure upgrade goals to check the rising population densities in the informal settlements, attention should also be paid to addressing the physical and psychological needs of the people across various age categories and abilities.

Also, the study revealed that five main activities: (1) going to mosque; (2) going to school or university; (3) going to work; (4) shopping; and (5) disposing garbage were predominantly undertaken by the respondents. The results suggest that the frequency of going to mosque is comparably higher than other activities. While going to mosque has the highest frequency and the lowest average distance, going to university emerged as the lowest frequency and the highest average distance (excluding trips for garbage disposal, because it is partially done by waste collectors). In addition, going to school had a slightly medium frequency and medium average distance, thus suggesting an inverse relationship between frequency and distance; that is the higher the frequency, the closer the distance.

The study also shows a likelihood of variation in the daily activities of the respondents according to age, gender, affiliation and literacy characteristics. However, the influence of gender seems to be more significant than the others. Females were found to be less active in all the daily activities except going to school and university. They were also likely less employed and literate. While these gender variations are largely attributed to social and cultural barriers, poor urban safety and insecurity are also culprits that should be addressed systematically.

Furthermore, the study showed that older adults of 55 years and above were more likely to have frequent trips to mosque, while adults aged 44 to 55 were more engaged in shopping. As expected, the employed and literate groups were recorded as the highest frequency of engaging in all the daily activities covered in this study.

Notably, the study did not find any group involving in leisure activities around the neighbourhood during the week. This is not only attributable to social, cultural and security constrains (especially for women and children), but lack of such facilities is also a contributing factor. Although there were no recreational facilities around the neighbourhood, over half (56.96 percent) of the respondents asserted that they currently visit such places. For such persons, they have to travel an average distance of 39.45km for an average frequency of 3.63 times in a year. Most respondents (83.12 percent) also showed positive dispositions to allowing women and children to visit parks in the event that they were available close to the neighbourhood with a suggested average distance of 0.6 kilometre. Therefore, providing such facilities in line with these considerations is likely to affect women's activities and promote their well-being at least in the short term. However, it is envisaged that long-term goals, focusing on increasing access to education and employment opportunities for women should also be considered.

The study discussed the peculiar opportunities and challenges posed by the living style and daily activities of informal settlers in Kabul city against the background that the development of an appropriate framework to harness these opportunities and mitigate the challenges will be based on this understanding. Although the research focus of this paper was informal settlements, the results and recommendations could be applied to formal settlements as well, especially detached houses. Therefore, we propose that further work be done to consolidate a neighbourhood-based framework for developing informal settlements.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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