Investigating Parenting Methods in Children's Everyday Use of Public Space

Nirma Yossa

{nirma.yossa@brin.go.id }

National Research and Innovation Agency, Gd. Widya Graha Lt. X. Jl. Jend. Gatot Subroto 10 Jakarta 12710

Abstract. Children's independent mobility promotes their physical activity and health. However, parental concerns about neighbourhood safety—traffic and strangers—often reduce children's independent mobility. The study aims to identify various parenting methods for supporting children's everyday use of public space. Using a qualitative retrospective approach with 36 mothers living in the Jakarta Metropolitan Area, the study shows that maternal perceptions of threats and dangers obtained from past and present experiences often affect their parenting methods for discouraging the children's movement.

Keywords: children's independent mobility, maternal perceptions, parenting methods, retrospective.

1 Introduction

Early childhood is an essential milestone in overall mobility development. It is the formative years for developing spatial ability, comprehending social environments, and learning to negotiate their presence in public and private spaces [1].

With surging attention being paid to children's independent mobility (CIM), it is important to identify how parents handle their children's everyday use of public space. In this study, CIM refers to letting children play in their own neighbourhoods without the supervision of adults [2].

Many studies have demonstrated the various benefits of increasing children's mobility. Previous studies found that CIM helps to increase children's physical health [3]; improve environmental knowledge and support motor skills and cognitive development [4]; and enhance spatial ability and social interaction [5],[6].

However, the rise of crime and traffic accidents in public places induces parents to erect numerous barriers to keep their children safe [7]. As a result, children are severely restricted in their exploration of the surrounding environment. Hence, the greater the parental control, the greater the fear children experience, causing a profound impact on their subsequent life stages [8].

Parents may be aware that they should let their children move around independently. However, they face a challenge when it comes to allowing children to be present unaccompanied in public

settings. It can be assumed that parents' perceptions of safety significantly impacted how they raised children [9].

Decisions to not allow children to navigate their presence in public space without adult company do not depend only on their assessment of the children's abilities and constraints or opportunities in their surrounding environments. Personal anxiety, experiences, and perceptions of the risks that children may encounter shape their parenting practises [10]. Increasing parental fears about the risk of children being involved in a traffic accident, becoming victims of crime, and meeting strangers in public settings leads to a decrease in CIM [10].

Research has indicated that parents' fear is not only a significant impediment to CIM. The evidence suggests that parents limit their children's mobility for various reasons, including societal pressures, a fear of strangers, and parents' time constraints [9]. Therefore, parents' motivations behind their decisions that allow or disallow children to navigate urban space unsupervised, are worth further exploration.

Women are more likely than men to be the ones to accompany children inside and outside the home, suggesting that supervising children's mobility is still a predominantly female responsibility [11]. Hence, examining the relationship between maternal roles for mobility care and their fears of declining children's ability to move around is considered significant, as the childhood life stage can significantly determine an individual's overall mobility development.

Using a qualitative retrospective approach, we interviewed mothers living in urban areas of the Jakarta Metropolitan Area (JMA). The interview attempts to understand regarding the facilitation or restriction of their children's exploration of their surroundings in diverse household situations. It sheds light on a variety of mothers' parenting approaches regarding children's mobility, including escorting and chauffeuring, coordinating role sharing with family members and others, preparing children for travel, negotiating their use of public space, and safeguarding them from potential traffic and threats in public spaces [9].

The research finds interesting results: mothers' behaviour to restrict children's mobility in public areas can be attributed to their perceived risk and apprehension of fear of crime and victimisation, which is influenced by their experiences of navigating public spaces throughout their life course. The interactions with their surroundings and gendered parenting methods regarding mobility that they experienced from a young age contribute to some extent to the formation of the attitudes that they pass on to their offspring.

2 Method

This article draws on in-depth interviews with 36 mother participants who lived in the JMA to explore parenting methods and children's mobility in specific urban contexts. They have lived in JMA for at least five years with a husband and children under eight years. Participants were recruited through "purposive" and "snowballing" techniques facilitated by the researcher's networks. Two-thirds of the mother participants in the study were born and raised in the village and rural areas of Java Island. However, they have since relocated to urban areas for reasons

such as pursuing higher education, seeking employment opportunities, and entering into marriage. The participants exhibit a wide age range between 20 to 35 years old, and their educational backgrounds span from elementary school to bachelor's degree level. More than half of female participants work outside their household as full-time or part-time workers, while the remainder are solely responsible for housework and child care.

Starting as parents in urban areas necessitated the formation of new perspectives and ideas regarding childhood in an entirely new context and environment. The diverse age groups, educational attainments, and socioeconomic backgrounds of mothers who participated in the study, along with their varied experiences of mobility in rural and urban settings, have contributed to the formation of distinct parenting cultures concerning the concept of mobility care for children. This has resulted in a reconfiguration of perspectives on spatiality.

The present study employs retrospective qualitative methodologies to comprehensively analyse pertinent factors that impact maternal perceptions of fears regarding children's mobility.

This method has been demonstrated to be effective in recalling experiences of significant events that occurred over a broad time [12],[13]. Participants can reflect on their travel decisions and recollect individual trips associated with key life events.

The interview inquiries concerned domestic routines, mobility patterns, local environment, perceptions regarding transport infrastructure and built environment, and parental upbringing. The methodology employed involved an iterative process that entailed alternating between data collection and analysis, writing memos, coding, and generating theory under the principles of grounded theory [14]. The methodology involves coding the interview data for processes, actions, and meanings and using analytical inquiries to establish developing categories [14].

3 Result and Discussion

Parents tend to be more cautious about their children's safety. They often send them to schools closer to their own home or the location of parents' workspace to ensure they can supervise and protect children from potential threats in public spaces. Parents with reliable transport for their children may find it easier to maintain such an arrangement. However, respondents who are dual earners need help to arrange a time for escorting their children. They often asked their parents to help co-supervise children while working, while other respondents made joint trips using a car or a motorcycle.

Many female participants elaborated that women were more likely than men to be the ones to accompany children to school, suggesting that supervising children's mobility is still a predominantly female responsibility.

Most working mothers said they require much more time in the mornings to get their children ready for school and themselves ready for work. Even though women's opportunities to get higher education and employment, they still bear multiple responsibilities in the household to take care of the home and children [15][16],[17]. This circumstance results in a double burden and time poverty for women. Participants often claim they are too exhausted from many

commitments at work and home, including keeping an eye on their children while they play outside.

There has been a significant increase in the usage of motorised vehicles over the past 20 years, whereas the use of walking and cycling has dropped [18]. This might be because driving is seen as safer than walking or riding a bike [19]]. This limited spatiality affects children's travel experiences and perspectives and, thus, influences their decision to navigate space in their future lives [20].

Some mother participants who had previously lived in rural/village regions reported that, before relocating to urban areas, they had attended school either individually or in small groups without any supervising adults present.

Participants explained that their parents relied on informal social control mechanisms such as social gatherings, pengajian (Quran recitations), and gatherings near the school to keep tabs on their children while they were not at home. It is also simpler to secure permission from parents to roam outside and play, stroll, or ride a bike anywhere within a 1-kilometre radius of their home. In retrospect, they claim that rural communities are safer than urban ones.

Rural regions provide environments and attributes that are advantageous for children's socialisation and imaginative play when compared to urban areas [21]. Some parents use their experiences living in villages to give children an appreciation for mobility at young age. Their parenting strategies cannot be isolated from the travel behaviour they experienced in early childhood significantly and continuously impact how individuals perceive their current mobility and navigate public spaces in the present life [22].

However, in urban areas, people of similar parental backgrounds, especially regarding their status as 'newcomers,' have different opinions on whether or not young children should be allowed to explore public spaces. Certain households in the present study reside in regions needing more public space amenities that are conducive to the needs of children.

Other participants shared contrast stories. For various reasons beyond their control, such as distance, transport mode options, transport expense, and, most crucially, parents' security concerns, many prohibit their children from going unaccompanied.

In term of the use of transport modes, many respondents voiced worries about the carelessness of public transport drivers; some said they felt anxious when drivers sped or drove in a way that diminished the comfort and safety of passengers. However, most respondents said they were open to taking their children on public transport but with some cautions.

Some participants said they only allowed their children to ride modern public transport such as the subway, busway, and train. Other than them, they considered public transport dangerous. Many participants were concerned about getting off local bus since the drivers seldom stopped completely and did not wait for everyone to get off before driving off.

Health was an issue brought up by many participants, specifically, smoking on public transport by the driver and some passengers. One of participants made a special note because her child has respiratory allergies; as a result, she and nearly all other participants said they might avoid taking public transport and instead use a more comfortable ridesharing service.

Cars are still considered the most reliable travel modes. However, just four people in this research said they had ever used a private car to get to school (either as a driver or a passenger).

Participants primarily rode motorcycles with their children to school and other destinations. Increasing traffic congestion in major cities reduces the effectiveness of public transport, and many are turning towards motorcycles because of their ability to navigate traffic.

The majority of men used motorcycles for work and used them for both short and long trips, while the majority of women rode them for short trips, such as taking care of children or grocery shopping. All the households reported owning at least one motorcycle, but only about half reported owning a car. Motorcycles are popular as they are more affordable than cars in Indonesia.

Most of the participants in this study reported using public transport modes such as buses and trains, but recently, many had shifted their primary modes to ridesharing services. For women juggling multiple duties, they provide many advantages, including flexibility in travel time and route, having fixed fare prices and commuter insurance, and offering other shipping and delivery services. Motorcycle taxis are more popular among ridesharing services as they can pass through traffic jams and small streets with ease, even though the cost is often higher than public transport.

Most participants agreed that their mobility and travel patterns radically shifted after childbirth and continued to change as their children grew up and went through their own various life stages. The addition of a new family member often necessitates a reorganisation of care and other responsibilities, with a clear gendered pattern emerging: Women take on more household and child-chauffeuring trips than men do, and men tend to maintain the same primary responsibilities regardless of changes in their larger households' composition [15],[16],[17].

Women tend to be required to juggle multiple duties such as employment, housework, and caregiving. Adding children into the household, two research participants chose to give up their jobs or considered resigning. They raised the notion of feeling guilty regarding motherhood.

Interview responses demonstrated how women's driving attitudes shifted after having children. Many participants reported changing their driving behaviour and being more cautious when transporting their children.

Most women in this study reported feeling unsafe when walking alone or taking public transport from an early age, suggesting that their fear of crime had been instilled in them throughout their life. It contributes to an increase of perceived fears when letting their children play outside without parents' companion.

The research confirms that parents can significantly impede or hinder their children's mobility [23]. With increasing urban development providing children with possibilities to improve their cognitive, social and physical growth, parents attempt to overcome their fear to support children's mobility [24]. With the positive parental judgement of the neighbourhood, children's independent mobility can grow and no longer be restricted [25].

This study highlights how parents' s supervision, especially mothers, on children's daily use of public space is deeply embedded in traditional norms, gender stereotypes, parents' fear of dangers and the mobility experience they gained, especially during childhood. All factors influence parenting methods and children's freedom to explore their surroundings.

Therefore, initiatives to promote children's physical and mental health by improving mobility should align with strategies for addressing parental concerns. Focusing solely on children's mobility while disregarding the potential impact of parenting practices on children's development may diminish the efficacy of CIM interventions.

The study also showcases that traditional gender roles have frequently portrayed women as weak, fragile, and inferior, leading parents to be more protective of their daughters than their sons. As a result, reduced CIM can be more severe for girls and has a lasting impact throughout adulthood. Notably, mobility experience during early childhood is significantly influenced by parental involvement that guides children regarding what they should and should not do to ensure their safety [20],[22].

Parenting strategies treating children differently based on gender could deeply impact their travel behaviours even in later stages of life. Hence, in the absence of any intervention to disrupt the cycle, gendered parenting is likely to persist across generations, thereby impeding the ability of girls to achieve independent mobility.

Existing literature offers several strategies that could potentially increase children safety when roaming their neighbourhood. These strategies include enhancing surveillance in residential areas to promote child monitoring through measures such as improved lighting, park amenities, green areas, and built-environment including neighbourhood designs that have characteristics of a child-friendly environment [26]. Additionally, fostering a stronger sense of social community and encouraging active monitoring of children in public spaces may also help to reduce the potential of crime [27].

Notwithstanding, these initiatives could potentially yield greater efficacy if accompanied by educational efforts concerning the significance of CIM, as well as the provision of supportive social networks that can assist in mitigating parental fears and improve CIM amidst diverse personal circumstances experienced by parents.

4 Conclusion

This finding demonstrates the diverse range of parenting methods in supervising children's mobility under different circumstances. It confirms that parents can significantly impede or

hinder their children's mobility [23]. It also showcases how women's personal fears, mobility experiences, residential relocations, and household arrangements influence their strategies to navigate their children's daily activities in public spaces.

With increasing urban development providing children with possibilities to improve their cognitive, social and physical growth, parents attempt to overcome their fear to support children's mobility [24]. With the positive parental judgement of the neighbourhood, children's independent mobility can grow and no longer be restricted [25].

Future researchers could employ diverse methodological approaches, including quantitative methods, to make a significant contribution to parenting strategies on CIM, given the intricate nature of households and the variety of mobility arrangements. Given that this study exclusively interviewed female participants, there exists an opportunity for further investigation by incorporating the perspectives of both parents and children. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of parental arrangements and children's perceived spatial mobility across various research settings and circumstances.

References

[1]   J. Mesman and M. G. Groeneveld, "Gendered parenting in early childhood: subtle but unmistakable if you know where to look," *Child Dev Perspect*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 22–27, Mar. 2018, doi: 10.1111/cdep.12250.

[2]   M. Hillman, J. Adams, and J. Whitelegg, *One false move ... : a study of children's independent mobility*. London: Policy Studies Institute, 1990.

[3]   S. Schoeppe, M. J. Duncan, H. Badland, M. Oliver, and C. Curtis, "Associations of children's independent mobility and active travel with physical activity, sedentary behaviour and weight status: a systematic review," *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, vol. 16, no. 4. pp. 312–319, Jul. 2013. doi: 10.1016/j.jsams.2012.11.001.

[4]   A. Rissotto and F. Tonucci, "Freedom of movement and environmental knowledge in elementary school children," *J Environ Psychol*, vol. 22, no. 1–2, pp. 65–77, 2002, doi: 10.1006/jevp.2002.0243.

[5]   M. Sissons Joshi, "Children's journey to school: spatial skills, knowledge and perceptions of the environment," *The British Journal of Development Psychology*, vol. 17, pp. 125–130, Mar. 1999.

[6]   J. C. Spilsbury, "Children's perceptions of the social support of neighborhood institutions and establishments," *Hum Organ*, vol. 64, no. 2, pp. 126–134, 2005, doi: 10.17730/humo.64.2.p99qeup9qebu6wv5.

[7]   G. Valentine, "'OH YES I CAN.' 'OH NO YOU CAN'T': CHILDREN AND PARENTS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF KIDS' COMPETENCE TO NEGOTIATE PUBLIC SPACE SAFELY," *Antipode*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 65–89, 1997.

[8]   S. De Groof, "And my mama said: the (relative) parental influence on fear of crime among adolescent girls and boys," *Youth Soc*, vol. 39, no. 3, pp. 267–293, Mar. 2008, doi: 10.1177/0044118X07301000.

[9]   A. T. McLaren and S. Parusel, "'Watching like a hawk': gendered parenting in automobilized urban spaces," *Gender, Place and Culture*, vol. 22, no. 10, pp. 1426–1444, Nov. 2015, doi: 10.1080/0966369X.2014.970141.

[10] A. Fyhri and R. Hjorthol, "Children's independent mobility to school, friends and leisure activities," *J Transp Geogr*, vol. 17, no. 5, pp. 377–384, Sep. 2009, doi: 10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2008.10.010.

[11] T. Schwanen, "Gender Differences in Chauffeuring Children among Dual-Earner Families," *The Professional Geographer*, vol. 59, no. 4, pp. 447–462, 2007.

[12] H. Müggenburg, A. Busch-Geertsema, and M. Lanzendorf, "Mobility biographies: A review of achievements and challenges of the mobility biographies approach and a framework for further research," *Journal of Transport Geography*, vol. 46. Elsevier Ltd, pp. 151–163, Jun. 01, 2015. doi: 10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2015.06.004.

[13] R. Schoenduwe, M. G. Mueller, A. Peters, and M. Lanzendorf, "Analysing mobility biographies with the life course calendar: a retrospective survey methodology for longitudinal data collection," *J Transp Geogr*, vol. 42, pp. 98–109, Jan. 2015, doi: 10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2014.12.001.

[14] J. D. Bringer, L. H. Johnston, and C. H. Brackenridge, "Using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to develop a grounded theory project," *Field methods*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 245–266, 2006, doi: 10.1177/1525822X06287602.

[15] W. Elias, J. Benjamin, and Y. Shiftan, "Gender differences in activity and travel behavior in the Arab world," *Transp Policy (Oxf)*, vol. 44, pp. 19–27, Nov. 2015, doi: 10.1016/j.tranpol.2015.07.001.

[16] J. Lee, I. Vojnovic, and S. C. Grady, "The 'transportation disadvantaged': urban form, gender and automobile versus non-automobile travel in the Detroit region," *Urban Studies*, vol. 55, no. 11, pp. 2470–2498, Aug. 2018, doi: 10.1177/0042098017730521.

[17] D. Mahadevia and D. Advani, "Gender differentials in travel pattern: the case of a mid-sized city, Rajkot, India," *Transp Res D Transp Environ*, vol. 44, pp. 292–302, May 2016, doi: 10.1016/j.trd.2016.01.002.

[18] C. R. Emond and S. L. Handy, "Factors associated with bicycling to high school: Insights from Davis, CA," *J Transp Geogr*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 71–79, Jan. 2012, doi: 10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2011.07.008.

[19] J. Kerr, D. Rosenberg, J. F. Sallis, B. E. Saelens, L. D. Frank, and T. L. Conway, "Active commuting to school: associations with environment and parental concerns," *Med Sci Sports Exerc*, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 787–794, Apr. 2006, doi: 10.1249/01.mss.0000210208.63565.73.

[20] L. Döring, J. Albrecht, J. Scheiner, and C. Holz-Rau, "Mobility Biographies in Three Generations - Socialization Effects on Commute Mode Choice," in *Transportation Research Procedia*, Elsevier, 2014, pp. 165–176. doi: 10.1016/j.trpro.2014.07.017.

[21] P. Foy-Phillips and S. Lloyd-Evans, "Shaping children's mobilities: Expectations of gendered parenting in the English rural idyll," *Child Geogr*, vol. 9, no. 3–4, pp. 379–394, 2011, doi: 10.1080/14733285.2011.590701.

[22] L. Döring, M. Kroesen, and C. Holz-Rau, "The role of parents' mobility behavior for dynamics in car availability and commute mode use," *Transportation (Amst)*, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 957–994, Jun. 2019, doi: 10.1007/s11116-017-9823-x.

[23] I. Marzi, Y. Demetriou, and A. K. Reimers, "Social and physical environmental correlates of independent mobility in children: a systematic review taking sex/gender differences into account," *International Journal of Health Geographics*, vol. 17, no. 1. BioMed Central Ltd., Jul. 03, 2018. doi: 10.1186/s12942-018-0145-9.

[24] F. R. Alparone and M. G. Pacilli, "On children's independent mobility: the interplay of demographic, environmental, and psychosocial factors," *Child Geogr*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 109–122, Feb. 2012, doi: 10.1080/14733285.2011.638173.

[25]   M. Prezza and M. G. Pacilli, "Current fear of crime, sense of community, and loneliness in Italian adolescents: the role of autonomous mobility and play during childhood," *J Community Psychol*, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 151–170, Mar. 2007, doi: 10.1002/jcop.20140.

[26]   S. Foster, K. Villanueva, L. Wood, H. Christian, and B. Giles-Corti, "The impact of parents' fear of strangers and perceptions of informal social control on children's independent mobility," *Health Place*, vol. 26, pp. 60–68, 2014, doi: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2013.11.006.

[27]   B. K. Scarborough, T. Z. Like-Haislip, K. J. Novak, W. L. Lucas, and L. F. Alarid, "Assessing the relationship between individual characteristics, neighborhood context, and fear of crime," *J Crim Justice*, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 819–826, Jul. 2010, doi: 10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2010.05.010.