SCHOOL SUPPORT NETWORKS IN BURKINA FASO

AS CHARACTERIZED BY CULTURAL VALUES AND CHANGING FAMILY SYSTEMS

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SPECIALIZATION EDUCATION, YOUTH AND INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN COOPERATION AND AID

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Every person in the world probably received support from others to some extent. In childhood, adolescence and even in adulthood we rely upon those people with whom we can share joy and laughter, sadness and fear. In our strive towards academic success or meaningful careers we seek support from our parents, siblings, family, friends and teachers. But how is social support perceived in cultures oriented towards group success? Does social support encompasses similar gestures and thoughts across cultures? This question is the topic of the present study, carried out in Burkina Faso in collaboration with the Christian RElief and Development Organization [CREDO]. With this study I aim to describe 1) school support networks in Burkina Faso, 2) the characteristics of network members and 3) the type of support provided by each network member. This research was part of my final project of the master's degree 'Education, Socialization and Youth Policy' with a specialization in 'Education, Youth, and International Humanitarian Cooperation and Aid' at Utrecht University.

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the influences of interdependent-oriented cultural values, e.g. group harmony and relational hierarchy, and societal changes on the size, composition, provision and content of support within Burkinabe children's primary school support networks. An ego-network survey and semi-structured interview were administered from twenty Burkinabe children who were enrolled in a sponsorship program of a local development organization (CREDO). The results with this mixed-method approach showed how school support networks of Burkinabe children are largely embedded within their socio-cultural context. Interdependent-oriented values as family harmony and respect to elderly were found to prevent children from seeking support from network members higher on authority. Peers were found to be important all-round support providers although girls had less peers within their networks than boys due to their greater work responsibilities outside school. Cultural values influencing school support networks were subject to societal changes like urbanization. Whereas family arrangements in rural areas corresponded to the extended family, in urban areas evidence was found for the presence of the modified extended family. Although continuing ties with extended kin, rural children had more kin within their networks than urban children. Recommendations for future policy on school support are presented.

Literature

Children's social worlds consist of rich networks of relationships: mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings, relatives, friend and teachers are all significant people in children's lives (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) and providers of social support (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Pugliesi & Shook, 1998; Sarason, Levine, Basham & Sarason, 1983). Social support is usually defined as the existence or availability of people on whom we can rely, people who let us know that they care about, value and love us (Sarason et al., 1983). Social support is especially important in relation to school, since it is found to be beneficial for the academic achievement of children (Brickman & Rhodes, 2007; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow & Fendrich, 1999; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). Social support enhances the capacity of children to withstand and overcome problem-solving challenges (Sarason et al., 1983) to enhance children's competences (DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991) and school outcomes (Rosenfeld, Richman & Bowen, 2000). Wentzel's (1998) study demonstrated that perceived social support increases pupils school motivation, both directly and indirectly through experienced distress. This finding has been supported by research on sense of relatedness by Furrer and Skinner (2003). Their results showed how children who feel related to teacher, parents and peers are more confident, work harder and engage more in academic activities. Supported children are able to achieve things that they could not have done alone (Goodenow, 1992).

Research on social support has been widely studied in the field of social network analysis (Fischer, 1982; Pugliesi & Shook, 1998; McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Social network analysis is based on the perception that social life is created by relations and interactions among people resulting in social networks. These social networks consist of network members or *nodes* that are tied by a specific type of relation like social support (Wasserman & Faust,

1994). A special form of network analysis is ego-network analysis, which consists of an actor termed ego and a set of alters, who have ties to ego, and a measurement on the ties among these alters (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Ties are believed to be embedded within larger socio-cultural frameworks and much research focuses therefore on the opportunities and constraints of a network and their influences on the availability of support for ego (Wellman, 1989). This perspective corresponds closely to the growing focus on community aspects within the social sciences (Benson, Leffert, Scales & Blyth, 1998) and can shed new light on broadly studied topics such as parental involvement in schooling. The concept of parental involvement owes considerable debt to the work of Epstein (1995) and is found to be positively related to children's academic well-being (Zellman & Waterman, 1998). Providing social support is however not limited to parents: support by peers, teachers, siblings, grandparents and other relatives also positively influence school motivation and success (DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Goodenow, 1992; Rosenfeld et al., 2000; Wentzel, 1998). There is considerable evidence that the well-being and academic functioning of children depends on all social ties they have (Benson et al., 1998) and therefore extend beyond parents. In using a social network perspective all possible providers of support will be taken into account and comparisons between network members can be made.

Relevance of school support networks in development issues

One of the Millennium Development Goals expected to achieve by 2015 is universal primary school completion (Ansell, 2005). Calculations reveal that many countries are far from reaching those goals, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2005). The establishment of equal partnerships between the local community and schools has become an important way of enhancing educational attainment and quality (Nieuwdorp, 2006). Community involvement can improve school curricula, school climate and parents' skills leading to more high quality schools (Epstein, 1995) and is beneficial to children's academic achievements. The degree of involvement among parents, families and communities in developing countries is however low (Lloyd & Blanc, 1996) and international donor organizations are therefore designing programs to promote school involvement in local communities (Nieuwdorp, 2006). Most research in sub-Saharan Africa focuses on the influence of parental, family or community involvement on children's school success (Engle & Breaux, 1998; Harting & Klompenhouwer, 2009; Lloyd & Blanc, 1996; Nieuwdorp, 2006). There has been less emphasis placed on the composition, availability and function of children's school support networks. Since children are actively involved in constructing their own social lives, research focusing on social relationships from a child's point of view is equally important (Ansell, 2005).

Current study

The current study tries to examine the school support networks of children living in rural and urban Burkina Faso. Therefore, ten children from rural and ten children from urban livelihoods will be asked to participate in an ego-network survey focusing on school support. Furthermore, they will be administered a semi-structured interview on the content of support provided by each network member. The results of the research will provide insight into cultural influences on *1* network characteristics, i.e. size and composition, *2* network member's characteristics, i.e. age, gender, kinship status, education level, location and frequency of contact, *3* tie content, i.e. the type of support provided by each network member. Furthermore, children's school support networks will be compared based on gender and geographical location and results will be discussed in reference to societal changes as urbanization. The present study will be conducted in Burkina Faso, one of the least developed countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Cultural framework

Support systems are likely to be influenced by the culture in which they are embedded since the ecological context determines how and in which manner relationships are established (Tietjen, 1989). One of the most profound distinctions is the independent-interdependent dichotomy. Whereas independency dominates Western countries, interdependency is generally found in Southern countries, like in Africa (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994). In the independent worldview, personhood is idealized in terms of individual achievement and autonomy, where in the interdependent worldview personhood is idealized in terms of relatedness with family and community (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Tietjen, 1989). These value orientations incorporate different goals for child development and consequently different socialization strategies. Research in Ghana revealed that children from a very early age on are trained to respect and obey adults and take on responsibilities towards their family (Twum-Danso, 2009). Research on the Nso children in Cameroun also provided evidence for respect and responsibility as core socialization goals, with an emphasis on the authority of adults (Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994).

The school support networks of children living in interdependent countries are also influenced by the specific configuration of the community life, like the *extended family* (Magaya, Asner-Self & Schreiber, 2005; Tietjen, 1989). The model where the child bearer is the child-caretaker is inappropriate for most of sub-Saharan Africa (Russell, 2003). Children in an extended family are not growing up surrounded by father, mother and siblings, but also by grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, cousins and their offspring (Wilson, 1989). Parenting is a shared responsibility and children therefore have multiple attachment figures instead of one or two, like is found in most Western countries (Ansell, 2005).

The socialization goals for children in interdependent cultures and their living arrangements make that children's self-concept is nested in relationships with others (Mpofu, 2002). Shweder and Bourne (1984) introduced the *egocentric* self-concept and the *sociocentric* self-concept, with the latter characterizing interdependent cultures. These findings have been extended by Markus and Kitayama (1991) who further distinguished between ego and other-focused emotions. Their idea is that individuals in interdependent cultures experience emotions that are in essence related to others, like guilt and sympathy. Overall there is consensus that children living in interdependent cultures are differently socialized than their Western counterparts, little is known however about how ecological cultural frameworks influence social support networks.

Social support in cultural context

The emphasis on interconnectedness with the group may lead to the assumption that social support is very common in interdependent-oriented cultures (Taylor, Sherman, Kim, Jarcho, Takagi & Dunagan, 2004). Twum-Danso (2009) reasoned that supportive relationships in interdependent-oriented cultures are based on the concept of reciprocity: all rights or entitlements come along with duties. Children show respect to parents and are obedient because this entails that parents take care of them too (Twum-Danso, 2009). In interdependent cultures social support may however be less common since any *extra* effort to bring personal problems to the attention of others may risk demanding inappropriate demands on the group (Magaya et al., 2005; Mpofu, 2002; Taylor et al., 2004) or disturbing relational harmony (Mortenson, 1998). So although the concept of communal sharing may be evident in interdependent-oriented countries, explicitly seeking support for personal problems may be less common. Evidence is found in a study on coping strategies of Zimbabwean adolescents who experienced less social support than American adolescents because of cultural norms where confrontation with an adult is viewed as challenging authority (Magaya et al., 2005). Furthermore, a comparison of independent Jews and interdependent Arabs in Israel also showed the reluctance of the latter to self-disclosure. Arabs responded significantly more often 'no one' than Jews when asked to whom they would turn to for support (Pines & Zaidman, 2003). Research also stresses the importance of relationship hierarchy in support seeking. Asian Americans reported sharing emotional experiences with family members and parents as less appropriate than European Americans due to power distance (Park, Brody & Wilson, 2007). Research in Israel showed that in independent-oriented families children are more likely to approach their parents because of a more democratic family structure (Pines & Zaidman, 2003). Power relationships are also stressed in African contexts, like in Ghana where children's demands on parents are seen as disrespectful (Twum-Danso, 2009).

Although cultural factors may explain cross-cultural differences with regard to social support in general, research also stresses similarities across cultures. Certain aspects of social support seem to be universal, like the need for support and the importance of support (Pines & Zaidman, 2003). Research on social networks in Mali also showed its relevance by describing support practices found in a West-African context (Adams, Madhavan & Simons, 2006). Therefore, the question may be not *if* social support occurs in different cultural contexts but how social support is perceived and which roles network members have (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Mortenson, 2008; Pines & Zaidman, 2003; Tietjen, 1989). Whether a child receives adequate support is based on the fact if the support provided is helping the child to develop those skills that are necessary to be a competent person according to the demands of the cultural context in which the child lives (Tietjen, 1989).

Network characteristics

The characteristics of the school support network may influence the school support children receive. Common studied network measures are network size and composition (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

Network size. As the size of the network increases, so does the numbers of alters that might give support to ego (Haythornthwaite, 2000; Wellman & Frank, 2001). There is however no clear evidence that large networks are qualitatively better in providing support than small networks; it seems more important that for each type of support ego has enough alters to rely upon (Vaux & Harrison, 1985). Egos with small networks are more likely to receive support from each alter every day but egos with large networks have more resources to support (Wellman & Frank, 2001). Cultural belief systems, by determining in which activities children participate, influence to a large extent children's access to different kinds of people (Tietjen, 1989). Children's opportunities to establish ties with alters affect the size of their support networks. Children in interdependent cultures are for example more exposed to kin relatives than Western children (Harrison, Stewart, Myambo & Teveraishe, 1997) and have generally large family sizes (Lloyd & Blanc, 1995) which may imply a larger network size. However, it is common in Africa that children spend several hours of the day working in and outside the house, especially girls (Harper & Marcus, 1999). Since school days are followed by work children may not be able to form or maintain ties with others which consequently results in small network sizes. Girls are more likely than boys to have work responsibilities (Harper & Marcus, 1999) which may indicate smaller network sizes for girls.

Network composition. Network composition is used to describe the proportion of certain characteristics within the network, like gender and kinship status (Wellman & Frank, 2001). Gender is found to be a strong divider of social networks, since most egos prefer same-sex alters, resulting in primarily male support networks for men and female support networks for women (Belle, 1989; Fischer, 1982; McPherson et al., 2001). Research has found that same-sex preferences are especially

strong in peer relationships (Feiring & Lewis, 1991). McPherson et al. (2001) argued however that same-sex networks are common since ties with others are established within an already segregated context. This suggestion may be useful in social network compositions of children in Burkina Faso. The social life in sub-Saharan Africa is often strongly gendered: men and women have fixed roles and therefore often engage in activities with same-sex others. From an early age girls have different (and more) work responsibilities than boys for example (Ansell, 2005). Furthermore, strong hierarchical differences between gender may also prevent children from seeking support from other-sexes (Ansell, 2005). Men are generally seen as the head of the family and therefore it's more appropriate that children give support to their father rather than receive it from him (Harper & Marcus, 1999). Evidence from Israel also revealed women's preference for mothers or older sisters instead of men (Pines & Zaidman, 2003).

The composition of social networks is also examined in kinship status, differing between close kin, extended kin and non-kin. Western literature found close kin (fathers, mothers and siblings) to comprise the most important part of a network (Wellman, 1989; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). It might be that in interdependent-oriented countries family relationships are even more strongly valued since these cultures are more family-oriented. Evidence is provided with research on Costa Rican children who valued close kin as significantly more important than their American counterparts (DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991). Siblings are found to be efficient replacements when parents are not available to provide support (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Sibling support indeed may be very essential in countries like Burkina Faso where parents are constantly working to make ends meet and lack time to provide enough support (Harper & Marcus, 1999). Also, siblings may provide school-related support since most parents are illiterate or not-educated (Harting & Klompenhouwer, 2009). Western literature found extended kin to be least likely to provide support (Wellman, 1989; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Extended kin may however be more important within extended family arrangements (Harrison et al., 1997; Lloyd & Blanc, 1996) since in African communities social support is traditionally provided within the tribe or community. This in agreement with research on African-American immigrants who are still found to rely heavily on outside household kinship members (Kim & McKenry, 1998). Non-kin, or peers, are important support providers in childhood and some research indicates an increase in peer relationships when children grow older (DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991; French, Rianasari, Pridada, Nelwan & Buhrmester, 2001). Since children in interdependent cultures are usually growing up in peer-groups and socialize each other, peer relationships may indeed be very supportive in interdependent contexts as well (Ansell, 2005; Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994). There are some indications that girls tend to rely more upon kin and boys more upon non-kin. Girls are often more bond to the household, since they work duties

including taking care of younger siblings (Ansell, 2005; Harper & Marcus, 1999; Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994) which consequently may limit their opportunity to engage with peers.

Network members' characteristics

Besides network characteristics, network members also determine what social support is available and to what extent. Age of the network member is for example an important predictor of social support. Hartup (1989) found that both vertical (other-age) and horizontal (same-age) relationships are necessary for optimal child development. Networks therefore ideally consist of alters from different ages, for each generation has different types of support to offer. In interdependent contexts vertical relationships may provide advice, guidance and basic needs to children (Etsey, 2005; Tietjen, 1989). Horizontal relationships may provide companionship or help with school (Hartup, 1989; Tietjen, 1989). Age characteristics may be especially relevant in interdependent-oriented countries since grandparents are often part of the extended family system (Lloyd & Blanc, 1996). Costa Rican children for example are found to view their ties with grandparents as more important than their independent-oriented American counterparts (DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991).

Network member's gender also determines the presence and form of social support. Children are likely to receive more support from their mothers since they invest more time, money and emotional support in their children's school careers (Lloyd & Blanc, 1996; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Research in sub-Saharan Africa confirms this finding and reasons this is due to fathers having often other competing demands, e.g. taking care of other children, like is found in polygamous families (Lloyd & Desai, 1992). However, research with Australian children revealed that children tend to favor support from the same-sex parent (Shute, De Blasio & Williamson, 2002) which may be in agreement with traditional gender role patterns found in Africa. More cross-cultural research may unravel this inconsistence in findings.

Kinship has proven to be very important in interdependent-oriented countries since family bonds are embedded in cultural life (Adams et al., 2006; Tietjen, 1989). Costa Rican children for example are found to rely mostly on kin for support (DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991). Kinship support has been associated with youth's educational achievement, especially their decision to pursue higher education (Lamborn & Nguyen, 2004). Extended kin is found to directly support children (Ainsworth, Beegle & Koda, 2000) and indirectly support children by functioning as a support provider for children's parents (Lamborn & Nguyen, 2004; Lloyd & Blanc, 1996). The closeness of the kinship-bond however may inhibit children in seeking support from kin (Taylor et al., 2004) by which children may turn to non-kin for support.

Another strong predictor support is the educational level of network members. It seems likely that alters' educational level influences the type of support they provide (Pugliesi & Shook,

1998). Research on parental involvement showed how illiteracy or ignorance with school matters may prevent parents from becoming involved with their children's education (Harting & Klompenhouwer, 2009; Nsamenang, 2003; Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994). Since the found relationship between parental support and their educational level this may also influence the provision of school support.

People are obviously more likely to receive support from people who are in close proximity (McPherson et al., 2001). In development countries modern communication devices that facilitate long-distance support are absent and therefore social support networks are more spatially bound than in Western countries (Höllinger & Haller, 1990; Fischer, 1982). Bruggeman (2008) showed in his research on networks in rural Burkina Faso how a local farmers network changed due to the arrival of one bike which enables him to establish ties wilt alters living in long distance locations. So although Western literature argued that location does not determine the presence of a support tie (Wellman & Wortley, 1990) this might well be the case in development countries. Location is also of importance for social support since it influences contact frequency. There is some general consensus that a tie is more supportive when ego and alter frequently interact, because mutual awareness of each other's needs arises (Kim & McKenry, 1998; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Whether this holds also for interdependent contexts is doubtful. Ties with frequent contact are usually emotionally close, which may imply children become reluctance to seek support from them due to fear of disturbing relational harmony (Taylor et al., 2004).

Tie content

Literature on social support mostly focused on quantitative aspects of the social network, although the type of social support provided - and by which network member - is of similar importance (Pugliesi & Shook, 1998). Social support research generally distinguished three types of support: information, instrumental and emotional support (Kim & McKenry, 1998; Taylor et al., 2004). In this study the relevance of these three concepts will be discussed in relation to school support. *Instrumental* support is described as tangible assistance, like the provision of services and financial aid. An example is parents paying for school fees, books or other school-related material (Tsum-Danso, 2009). *Emotional* support in relation to school support is defined as stimulating and motivating children's academic development (Hamre & Pianta, 2005) and showing trust in their abilities (DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991). *Informational* support contains direct help on school matters, like explaining homework or asking questions on school-related matters (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Another commonly studied support type is *companionship* (DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991; Reid, Landesman, Treder & Jaccard, 1989). In the present study companionship will refer to how and with whom children engage in outside-school activities. Companionship may be

very important in an interdependent context like Burkina Faso where children spend much time with peers and are often socialized within the peer group (Ansell, 2005; Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994).

Cultural influences on tie content

In the present study instrumental, emotional, informational support and companionship will be used to describe the school support networks of children living in rural and urban Burkina Faso. It is important to note that differences in support classifications between cultures are found in the literature (Adams et al., 2006; LeVine, 2003; Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994; Tietjen, 1989). Research by Adams et al. (2006) on women's support networks in rural Mali found evidence for four types of support: practical, material, emotional and cognitive support. Although these types of support show considerable resemblance to the types of support in this study, one might not presuppose that social support is universal in nature. In the present study instrumental, emotional, informational support and companionship will therefore be used as broad categories and not considered as typologies that are universal in the sense that these forms are equally important in each culture. On the contrary, the aim is to provide a more cross-cultural and holistic view on these concepts by describing Burkinabe thoughts and practices on social support and school support specifically.

Cultural framework of school support

Tietjen (1989) argued, based on her study on social networks in Papua New Guinea, that interdependent cultures are mainly characterized by instrumental support and companionship. This is possibly due to their emphasis on the economic function of the family and interrelatedness. In countries with poor socio-economic conditions like Burkina Faso, instrumental support may well be the answer to the children's needs. Research in Zimbabwe showed how the extended family in itself is an important instrumental support provider (Harrison et al., 1997). This is confirmed by evidence from Tanzania where the extended family is found to support orphans financially after the death of their parents (Ainsworth et al., 2000). Furthermore, research on primary school pupils in Ghana revealed a lack in instrumental needs as breakfast, text books and basic needs as explanation of their low school performances (Etsey, 2005). Companionship – in an interdependent worldview- may be a better alternative than emotional support, since it does not demand sharing your emotional problems which undermines interdependent values (Taylor et al., 2004). In other words, emotional support might become more socially oriented within interdependent cultures in the form of companionship. Western literature found peers and siblings to be the most important providers of companionship. Western children spend their free time with having fun or playing together (Reid et al., 1989; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Since children in interdependent cultures are usually socialized within peer groups, similar results might be found in Burkina Faso (Ansell, 2005;

Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994). Children in interdependent cultures however often have other responsibilities outside school, like performing household chores and taking care of younger siblings (Ansell, 2005; Harper & Marcus, 1999) which may limit their time for play. This is especially true for girls who therefore may benefit less from companionship and are less exposed to peers (Harper & Marcus, 1999). Although companionship might be provided by peers and siblings too, children in interdependent cultures probably engage in different activities, i.e. work rather than play.

School support systems are also defined by informational support. The question is if informational support can be found in interdependent contexts and in which manner. Nsamenang (2006) argued that cultural contexts differ in shaping the learning environment of children. Two broad learning traditions are distinguished: the instructional perspective and the participatory model. African countries have developed a hybrid character because their indigenous practices based on participatory learning are exposed to modern models based on instructional learning (Nsamenang, 2003; Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994). The formal education brought along by colonization is made to produce individuals who can compete with others, which is in contradiction with interdependent development goals focusing on group performances (Daun, 2002). Therefore network members may be hindered to provide informational support since learning styles and goals pursued by the school are different from their own learning styles and goals. Recent research on parental involvement in Burkina Faso however showed that parents are willing to assist their children with school (Harting & Klompenhouwer, 2009). Literature indicated low parental involvement levels but this was due to educational and socio-economic factors, like low educational levels, illiteracy and lack of time (Harper & Marcus, 1999; Harting & Klompenhouwer, 2009). Literature on ethnic minorities in Western countries also showed that higher educated parents are more involved with school (Eldering, 2006; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). High educational levels in interdependent countries like Burkina Faso are however rare and therefore children might look for informational support providers elsewhere. Harper and Marcus (1999) argued that children in these cases usually turn to older siblings and peers. This may well be the case since children in interdependent-oriented countries are found to spend much time with peers and siblings (Ansell, 2005). The extent of child-to-child socialization is substantial and perhaps even more than direct parent-child socialization (Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994). Of course, members of the extended family, e.g. cousins, uncles or aunts, who are higher educated could also be a possible informational support provider.

To conclude, where instrumental support and companionship may be more present in interdependent cultures like Burkina Faso, emotional support is thought to be less appropriate due to cultural beliefs, socio-economic conditions and educational levels. These hypotheses are interesting in the light of specialist versus generalist support networks. Wellman and Wortley (1990) argued that support networks may be *general* in that ego can retrieve all types of support from

multiple network members and *specialist* in that ego can only obtain specific types of support from certain network members. The social networks of children in Burkina Faso may be general in providing instrumental support since this is seen as a basic need in cultures high on interrelatedness and low in socio-economic conditions (Tietjen, 1989). Since informational and emotional support are found to be less broad available, children may have to 'shop' through their network in order to find an alter who may offer these types of support. This suggestion relates to the concept of strong versus weak ties proposed by Granovetter (1983). Since emotional and informational support seems less broadly available in interdependent cultures egos may start seeking these types of support from weak ties (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Granovetter (1983) reasons that weak ties are essential because they provide access to resources that are not yet available within the network.

Changing family systems

School support networks and social support in general are not only subjected to cultural values but also to the social systems in which they are embedded. To state otherwise, the independent - interdependent dichotomy is subject to societal changes. Urbanization levels in agrarian cultures are high and this result in families being split up: extended families are being replaced by nuclear families (Aldous, 1962; Ansell, 2005; Bongaarts, 2001; Swadener, Karibu & Njenga, 2000; Anijas & De Bruin, 2009). Due to urbanization and industrialization household income rises and consequently more independent values are adapted (Bongaarts, 2001; Russell, 2003). Whereas the extended family is organized by kin-bonds, the nuclear family is organized by martial relationships and usually consists of man, wife and children (Kağitçibaşi, 1996). Tibajiuka and Kaijage (1995) argued that family responsibilities are increasingly viewed in terms of the nuclear family and therefore extended kin provides less support to others' children than before. The disappearance of the extended family therefore might hold serious threats for children's development (Israel, Beaulieu & Hartless, 2001). Putnam (1995) stated that loosing family bonds are an example of the weakening of social capital: "*a set of interpersonal relationships within the family and community"* (Israel et al., 2001: p. 44). Urbanization and industrialization led to social disengagement: individuals become less socially organized and their support networks become consequently weakened (Putnam, 1995).

Kağitçibaşi (1996) has nuanced the described change from extended to nuclear families and argued that African countries develop an 'extended modified family' based on traditional and modern values. Evidence for this hypothesis is found in Uganda where the Buganda lives in nuclear households and simultaneously has extended social networks (Annijas & De Bruin, 2009). Research in South-Africa revealed a similar pattern with results showing that urban black families have created their own family norms, based on traditional and modern standards (Russell, 2003). Kağitçibaşi (1996) argued that within the modified family material bonds are weakening while emotional bonds

– or relatedness among kin- persists. Harrison et al. (1997) found in their study on urban living arrangements in Zimbabwe also evidence for the modified family and argued that relatedness with extended family still continued. Other research also found that kin-bonds continue to exist although they become loser and weak ties gain in importance (Höllinger & Haller, 1990; McPherson et al., 2001). This is in line with results from Zimbabwe (Harrison et al., 1997). Adolescents from extended families and modified families both highly valued intimacy, but differed on their opinion with whom intimacy must be shared. Adolescents in extended families preferred close and distant kin and adolescents from modified families non-kin, e.g. teacher and peers. It may be that within the modified extended family children rely less upon kin and more upon non-kin.

The modified extended family may influence the composition of networks and thereby also the types of support provided. The economic function of the extended family becomes less important or even disappears (Kağitçibaşi, 1996) and therefore instrumental support among kin may be less common. Since modified families are found to use more independent-oriented values (Annijas & De Bruin, 2009; Ansell, 2005) emotional support may gain in importance since seeking support from others is less a threat for social harmony than before (Taylor et al., 2004). The adaptation to more individualistic values might also increase the use of informational support since the gap between school (independent) and home (interdependent) values reduces (Nsamenang, 2003; Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994). LeVine (2003) argued however that network members become limited in providing school support because they are unfamiliar to education and to the skills necessary to succeed in an educated world. Overall changing family arrangements followed by social network changes in composition and provision may be best understood in Tietjen's (1989) theory of social network quality. Tietjen (1989) argued that the quality of the support network is determined by the demands of the cultural context. Changes in social networks are necessary because the cultural context in which they are embedded is subject to change as well.

Research questions

In order to investigate the school support networks of Burkinabe children three research questions were formulated. The research questions are:

- How can school support networks of children living in rural and urban Burkina Faso be described in terms of size and composition?
- How can school support networks of children living in rural and urban Burkina Faso be described in terms of the type and provision of support?
- How do Burkinabe school support networks differ with respect to gender and geographical location?

The implications of the answers to these three research questions will be described in reference to cultural values and societal changes. The final research question therefore is: what do the results on the above questions imply for the influence of cultural values on Burkinabe school support networks, and in particular, how support networks may change as families move from rural to urban locations?

Method

The school support networks of sponsored children are examined using a mixed-method approach, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. Ego-network surveys and semi-structured interviews with children from nine primary schools throughout the country were conducted in February and March 2010. The quantitative data derived from the name generator will answer research questions on the structure of networks, e.g. network size, network composition and network member's characteristics. The qualitative data following from the social network interview will answer research questions on the content of support, e.g. how school support is perceived in Burkina Faso and which types of support are provided by different alters. For all measures comparisons will be made on gender and geographical location.

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso was known as Upper Volta until 1983 and colonized by France until it achieved its independence in 1960. Burkina Faso is composed of more than 60 ethnic groups, from which the two largest, Mossi and Dioula, participated in this study. Burkina Faso's economy is mostly based on agriculture although drought and irregular rainfalls hinder agricultural production (Ki & Ouadreogo, 2006). Burkina Faso is one of the Least Developed Counties (LDC) in the world and the population generally lives from less than 1$ a day, which is below the national poverty threshold. Furthermore, half of the population has no access to basic social services like education (Ki & Ouadreogo, 2006). The children participating in this study are part of this population. CREDO has explicitly chosen to aim its sponsorship program directly towards the poorest by implementing the program in regions where poverty levels inhibit parents from sending their children to school (Van 't Rood, 2007).

The Burkinabe society has an interdependent-oriented character and is organized on the basis of family lineage: highest on social hierarchy are elders and lowest children (Belembaogo, 1994). Burkina Faso has however been exposed to modern value orientations which consequently resulted in differences between urban and rural regions. In rural regions most people are farmers, living in small villages with a low density in schools. In urban regions people work mainly in public facilities, living in large cities where infrastructure and schools are widely available. The Burkinabe society differs distinctively from those found in Western countries but differences are present within Burkina Faso as well. In this research results are presented on Burkinabe children, although these

refer explicitly to the Mossi and Dioula. References made to other ethnic groups or African countries should be made cautiously.

Sample

CREDO sponsors seventeen primary schools in four different regions of Burkina Faso (Table 1). In order to generalize the results found in the sample of Burkinabe children to all sponsored children on CREDO schools, nine primary schools participated in the present study, with at least one school of each region where CREDO is active. Distinctions were also made between schools in urban (city centre) or rural (outside city centre) areas (Table 1) in order to examine differences based on geographical location. The headmasters of all participating primary schools were asked to select two participants from the 6th grade, one from each gender. In total ten boys and ten girls with ages ranging from eleven to fourteen years old participated in this study. Headmasters included only children who were enrolled in the sponsorship program and who could easily express themselves in French.

Table 1. *Participating Schools*

Region	Schools	City Centre	Outside city centre	Number of male(s)	Number of female(s)
Centre-Ouest	Evangelique de Salbisgo		x	1	1
	Evangelique de Reo		x	1	1
	Evangelique de Leo	x		1	1
Centre	Betsaleel	x		1	2
	Raoul Follereau	x		1	1
	Wendlasida		x	1	1
	Geswende	x		2	1
Nord	Evangelique de Yako		x	1	1
Hauts Bassins	Ev. de Banakeledaga		x	1	1
Total		**4**	**5**	**10**	**10**

All children were enrolled in grade 6th (CM2), the last grade of primary school, since they are more advanced in the French language and older children generally better know how to distinguish among the different people they know (Reid et al., 1989). At Evangelique de Reo, interviews were held with children from grade 5th since the school started five years ago and therefore no grade 6th was available. In order to maintain validation of data, headmasters were asked to specifically select those children who spoke good French and easily communicated with people who are new to them. During the interviews children did not seem to experience any more difficulties than participants from other schools and results are therefore incorporated into the present study.

Procedure

Data was collected using two different methods. First, all participants were asked to elicit all their contacts that supported them in relation to school through a name generator. Second, all participants were administered a semi-structured interview about support in general. Also, all children were given specific examples and asked to name those persons where they would turn to for support.

Interviews were held individually and in the presence of two interviewers and one translator. The participants spoke in French but when necessary in their local language, either Mooré or Dioula which was subsequently translated into French by the translator. The interview followed after an introduction of the people present and the subject of discussion. A pilot study has been carried out to examine whether children were able to recall all supportive people they knew, if they could provide enough information on their characteristics, if the given examples of support where recognizable for children and if they were able to understood all interview questions. Despite some small differences in phrasing no other changes were made and data from these three interviews are therefore added to the present study.

Measurement instruments

Name generator

In this study an ego-network approach is adopted focusing on ego and its ties with alters. Participants were administered a personal social network interview in which they listed all alters who provided them with school support by giving their relation to this person (Appendix 1). Relational levels were: *1* father, *2* mother, *3* older or younger sibling, *4* family relative, *5* grandparent, *6* teacher and *7* peers. The personal social network interview has a free-call character; respondents are not limited in stating individuals since this could be a threat to reliability (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The disadvantages of the free-call method are however that participants are more likely to forget important alters or to state more individuals than necessary (Carrasco, Hogan, Wellman & Miller, 2005; Marin & Wellman, 2009). These threats have been taken into consideration. First, since half of the participants stated very large groups of friends they were asked who were their best friends and only those were included in their school support network. Furthermore, when participants only stated few support providers from one or two relational levels, they were asked if they did not have support providers in one of the other relational levels. In the majority of cases participants stated again many others who were consequently added to their network.

Network member characteristics. For each individual in the network participants had to report on their characteristics like age, gender, kinship status, location, frequency of contact and education level. Although age levels were obtained for most alters, participants were not able to

provide sufficient information on the age of parents, grandparents and teachers. Participants inability to recite their alters characteristics is a well-known problem and a possible threat for reliability (Marin & Wellman, 2009) and this data therefore has been excluded from this research.

Kinship status was defined as close, extended or non-kin, where location is categorized in close proximity, town residence, country residence and residence abroad. Participants reported their frequency of contact with each network member and data was categorized into every day, four to six times a week, one to three times a week, monthly, one to four times a year, and (almost) never. Although participants sometimes were unable to report on educational levels of some network members, results are incorporated into the present study since a sufficient amount of information was available. Educational level was categorized into four different levels: no education, primary education, secondary education and higher education.

Network characteristics. The personal school support network characteristics assessed were network size and network composition. Network size was the total number of ego's ties with alters within its school support network. Network composition further examined alters specific characteristics' e.g. the percentage of gender and kin within the school support network.

Qualitative interview

Participants completed a semi-structured interview which examined the school support given by each alter. The semi-structured interview contained three different parts. First, participants were asked what kind of support they received from each individual listed in the name generator and gave examples of this support. Second, participants were asked to describe what support is and the importance of providing support to somebody (Appendix 1). For example: *'We have talked about people who provide you with support. Can you tell me what it means, supporting somebody?*'. Data may provide information on possible cultural specific aspects in participants' definition of support and therefore contribute to the cross-cultural validity of this study.

Third, all participants were given eight examples of school-related situations in which they could need support from a network member (Appendix 2). These examples comprised three examples for emotional, two for instrumental and informational support and one for companionship and were based on previous research (Reid et al., 1989). For each example participants had to indicate to whom they would turn for support according to the situation. Also, they were asked why they chose to seek help from this network member and what this network member will say to them. In order to enhance the instrumental validity of the examples precautions were made. First, examples are introduced to local staff of CREDO in order to increase the cross-cultural validity. Second, the interview, including examples, has been piloted several times in order to make sure that participants understood the examples in the way they were meant to.

Analysis

Name generator

Data on network (members) characteristics were analyzed with SPSS. With SPSS mean averages, standard deviations and between-group comparisons were calculated. Using SPSS the obtained data was also analyzed on network size and composition. These analyses will yield results on network size, composition and network members characteristics focusing on differences between gender and geographical location.

Qualitative interview

The data derived from the semi-structured interview was analyzed for the three parts of the interview separately. Analyses were made by using computer program MAXQDA 2008 since the usage of this software simplifies the analysis of qualitative data (Boeije, 2005). These analyses will yield results on how school support is perceived in Burkina Faso and which type of support is provided by each network member. Specific attention will be given to the availability of social support throughout the network and the generalist or specialist support role of network members. These measures will all be compared on gender and geographical location.

Data of the first and third part of the interview were analyzed by categorizing responses into one of the four support categories: instrumental, emotional, informational and companionship. The usage of a support classification system based on Western principles in Burkina Faso may threaten the instrumental validity of the study since support types are not necessarily universal. Cultural differences were however recognized and instead of judging participants answers on Western ideas, participants answers were used to put support styles found in Western countries in cross-cultural perspective. So while respecting cultural differences, Burkinabe thoughts on school support networks are compared to support types found in Western cultures.

The first part of the interview is analyzed by categorizing all given responses for each network member into the four different types of support: emotional, informational, instrumental support and companionship. Subsequently, for each type of support was counted how frequent they were stated and for which alters. The answers on the second part of the interview are analyzed question by question and coded into different themes. Subsequently all given themes were counted and illustrative quotes marked. The last part of the interview has been analyzed example by example and answers were compared based on the four different support categories. For each example has been examined which network members were mentioned and why. It was also counted how many times all possible network members were stated. Analyses for all three parts of the interviewed contained also comparisons between boys and girls and rural and urban living conditions.

Results

The results section consists of two parts: the quantitative and the qualitative results. The quantitative results are derived from the name generator and deal with 'network size', 'network composition' and 'network member characteristics'. In this part more insight will be given into the structural components of the school support network of children living in Burkina Faso. The qualitative results are drawn from interview data and comprise 'importance of support' and 'reasons for social support'. In this section results on how social support is perceived and how social support is put into practice will be discussed.

Quantitative results

Network size

The total network size was obtained in order to examine the amount of ties within the school support network of Burkinabe children. The possibility of differences in network sizes between gender and geographical location (urban – rural areas) were investigated. Results showed that network sizes differ from a minimum of nine to a maximum of 25 network members, with a mean of fifteen (*sd* = 5.3). Network sizes for girls were smaller and ranged from ten to eighteen network members with a mean of 13.3 (*sd* = 2.9). Boys network sizes were larger and varied from nine to 25 network members with a mean of 16.7 (*sd* = 6.7). Boys and girls school support networks differed however not significantly ($t(12.2)$, $p = .17$). Network sizes in urban and rural areas ranged from nine to 25 with means of respectively 14.8 (*sd* = 6) and 15.2 (*sd* = 5). Differences between urban and rural network sizes were however minimal ($t(18)$, $p = .87$). So although school support network sizes were comparable between urban and rural areas, boys were found to have larger network sizes than girls.

Network composition

Network composition has been investigated in order to more thoroughly examine network sizes. Network composition measures looked for differences in the proportion of gender and kin within the network. Again, differences between girls and boys networks and geographical location were taken into account (Table 2). The results on network composition showed that support networks consist in general of more men than women, with means of 8.75 (*sd*= 6.3) for the proportion of men and 6.25 (*sd*= 3.3) for the proportion of women. There were also differences found between boys and girls networks. The total amount of women in the network was significantly higher for girls than for boys ($t(18)$, $p = .000$) with means of 3.7 for boys and 8.8 for girls. The proportion of men within the network was significantly higher for boys than for girls (t (10.7), $p = .001$) with means of 13 for boys

(*sd* = 6.0) and 4.5 for girls (*sd* = 1.8). Although networks were same-sex oriented, results showed no difference in gender composition between urban and rural networks.

Table 2. *Overview of Network Composition for Boys and Girls*

	Boys				Girls			
	Urban	Rural	**Total**	Cum (%)	Urban	Rural	**Total**	Cum (%)
Father	3	4	**7**		3	5	**8**	
Mother	5	5	**10**	10.2	5	5	**10**	13.5
Older/younger brother	3	8	**11**		8	11	**19**	
Older/younger sister	4	5	**9**	22.2	5	6	**11**	36.1
Uncle	4	4	**8**		2	5	**7**	
Aunt	2	-	**2**		5	1	**6**	
Cousin	-	1	**1**	28.7	2	2	**4**	48.9
Grandfather	3	1	**4**		-	-	**-**	
Grandmother	2	2	**4**	33.5	1	3	**4**	51.9
Teacher	5	4	**9**	38.9	4	3	**7**	57.1
Male peers school	24	25	**49**		-	-	**-**	
Female peers school	7	-	**7**	72.5	23	17	**40**	87.2
Male peers home	19	23	**42**		-	1	**1**	
Female peers home	2	1	**3**	99.4	6	7	**13**	97.7
Others	-	1	**1**	**100**	1	2	**3**	**100**
Total	83	84	**167**		65	68	**133**	

The kinship composition within the school support networks of Burkinabe children was examined distinguishing three categories: close kin, extended kin and non-kin. Whereas close kin referred to parents and siblings, extended kin consisted of aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. Non-kin were all network members who were not related to the respondent. Results on kinship proportions revealed that networks consisted mainly out of non-kin, *m* = 8.75 (*sd* = 5.1) followed by close kin, *m* = 4.25 (*sd* = 1.3) and distant kin, *m* = 2 (*sd* = 1.8). Gender comparisons revealed that boys have significantly more non-kin than girls (*t*(10.5), *p* = .04). Girls were found to have more close kin in their network although results were not significant (*t*(18), *p* = .06). The amount of extended kin within boys and girls networks was however comparable.

The kinship composition of networks was also examined on geographical location. The proportion of extended kin and non-kin was found to be similar in urban and rural areas. Comparisons on the amount of close kin showed however significantly larger proportions of close kin in rural areas (*t*(18), *p* = .025). Results showed that in rural areas children have more close kin in their network than in urban areas.

In order to inspect gender differences in children's ties with peers, the amount of peers within the network was obtained. Further distinctions were made between peers with whom respondents meet at school or at home to determine in which environment differences occur. Gender comparisons on peer composition revealed significant results. The total amount of peers (school and home) was significantly higher in boys networks ($t(10.6)$, p =.04). Especially the number of home peers was higher in boys networks ($t(18)$, p =.007). Comparisons between boys and girls networks in relation to peers' gender also yielded significant differences. Results showed that boys have significantly more male school peers in the network ($t(9)$, p =.003) and girls significantly more female school peers ($t(18)$, p = .000). The same pattern emerged for home peers: boys have significantly more male home peers than girls ($t(9.2)$, p =.001). Although results for girls are in the same direction, no significant difference was found. Results showed that boys and girls have mainly same-sex peers. Furthermore, boys have more ties with peers in general and with home peers specifically.

Overall, results on network composition revealed that boys and girls networks consist of same-sex ties, especially with peers. Furthermore, girls are found to have more close kin whereas boys have more non-kin within their network. Network compositions are found to be quite similar in urban and rural locations, although rural networks did have more close kin than urban networks.

Network member characteristics

In order to describe the specific characteristics of Burkinabe school support networks, network members' age, gender, kinship status, location, frequency of contact with ego and educational level were examined. Network member's characteristics were compared on gender and geographical location and will be presented in three parts. First characteristics of close kin network members will be discussed, followed by extended kin and non-kin network members.

Close kin

Close kin network members are fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters and for each member results on age (if available), kinship status, location, frequency of contact and educational level are presented (see Table 3). The most evident results will be discussed and comparisons between gender and geographical location given.

The results on close kin characteristics showed that most close kin lives within the same household as and interact daily with the respondent. Siblings are more likely to live further away and interact less with ego than parents. With regard to educational levels, parents scored below primary education with mothers having lower educational levels than fathers. Siblings educational levels are above primary education with higher means for sisters, although these were also older.

Table 3. *Close Kin Characteristics*

Characteristic	Fathers	Mothers	Brothers	Sisters
Mean age	-	-	12.3 *(sd = 6)*	16.6 *(sd = 8)*
Location in %				
Same household	71.4	78.9	63	65
Close proximity	-	-	-	-
Town residence	-	-	13.3	10
Country residence	15.8	21.4	16.7	20
Abroad	7.1	5.3	6.7	5
Contact frequency in %				
7 times a week	71.4	78.9	63.3	70
4 to 6 times a week	-	-	-	-
1 to 3 times a week	-	-	3.3	3.3
Once a month	7.1	-	3.3	3.3
1 to 4 times a year	14.3	15.8	26.7	20
(almost) never	7.1	5.3	3.3	3.3
Mean educational level	.93 *(sd=1)*	.63 *(sd = .8)*	1.33 *(sd=.7)*	1.50 *(sd=.9)*

The presented results on close kin were compared on gender and geographical location. Gender comparisons on close kin characteristics revealed that parents and siblings of boys live closer to and more frequently interact with ego. Boys sisters were significantly more likely to live closer to ego than girls sisters (*t*(17.1), $p = .05$). With regard to educational levels, siblings in girls networks were more educated although no significant results were found. Overall, gender comparisons indicated that boys live closer and are more in contact with their parents and siblings than girls. Also, boys parents are higher educated than girls parents. The educational level of siblings is however higher in girls networks.

Next to gender comparisons, network members characteristics were compared between urban and rural areas. Analyses showed that parents in rural areas live closer to and more frequently interact with their child. In urban networks parents are however more educated. Location and frequency of contact measures of siblings were higher in urban networks. For sisters significant results were found for location (*t*(13.8), $p = .02$) and frequency of contact (*t*(12.6), $p = .04$). Comparisons on educational level showed that siblings are higher educated in rural networks. Overall, parents and siblings characteristics showed a contradictory pattern. Parents in rural areas live closer to and have more contact with ego whereas parents in urban areas are more educated. Siblings on the contrary live closer to and interact more with ego in urban areas and are higher educated in rural areas.

Extended kin

Extended kin network members are uncles, aunts, cousins, grandfathers and grandmothers. For each member results on age (if available), kinship status, location, frequency of contact and educational

level are presented (see Table 4). First results on uncles and aunts will be discussed, followed by cousins and grandparents.

Table 4. *Extended Kin Characteristics*

Characteristic	**Fathers**	**Mothers**	**Brothers**	**Sisters**
Mean age	-	-	12.3 *(sd = 6)*	16.6 *(sd = 8)*
Location in %				
Same household	71.4	78.9	63	65
Close proximity	-	-	-	-
Town residence	-	-	13.3	10
Country residence	15.8	21.4	16.7	20
Abroad	7.1	5.3	6.7	5
Contact frequency in %				
7 times a week	71.4	78.9	63.3	70
4 to 6 times a week	-	-	-	-
1 to 3 times a week	-	-	3.3	3.3
Once a month	7.1	-	3.3	3.3
1 to 4 times a year	14.3	15.8	26.7	20
(almost) never	7.1	5.3	3.3	3.3
Mean educational level	.93 *(sd=1)*	.63 *(sd = .8)*	1.33 *(sd=.7)*	1.50 *(sd=.9)*

The results showed that extended kin is less likely than close kin to live within the same household as ego. Less than half of all uncles, cousins and to a lesser extent aunts and grandmothers lives within the same household and has daily contact with ego. With regard to educational levels, cousins are the most educated with levels ranging closely to secondary education. Aunts and uncles followed with educational levels above primary education. Grandparents, and especially grandmothers, are the lowest educated with levels below primary education.

All presented results were compared on gender and geographical location. Gender comparisons of uncles and aunts characteristics showed similar results. Boys live closer and are more in contact with their uncles and aunts than girls. The aunts and uncles in girls networks are however higher educated. Gender comparisons on cousins characteristics showed a contradictory pattern. Girls live closer and are more in contact with their cousins than boys although cousins in boys networks are higher educated. Gender comparisons for grandparents showed that girls grandmothers live closer to and interact more with ego although grandmothers in boys networks are higher educated. There were however no significant results found. Overall, gender comparisons showed contradictory results. Where location and frequency of contact levels are higher for one gender, educational levels are higher for the other gender.

Next to gender comparisons, extended kin characteristics were also compared on geographical location. Results showed that uncles ($t(6)$, $p = .033$), aunts ($t(6)$, $p = .03$) and cousins in urban networks live closer to respondents than in rural networks. Also, respondents in urban areas were more in contact with uncles, aunts and cousins. With regard to educational level however,

uncles and aunts were higher educated in rural networks and cousins more in urban networks. Grandparents characteristics revealed that both grandparents are higher educated in urban networks although grandparents in rural networks live closer to ego. Differences were found in the frequency of contact with ego. Grandfathers have more contact with ego in urban areas whereas grandmothers have more contact with ego in rural areas. Overall, comparisons on gender and geographical location revealed clear distinctions between location / contact frequency on the one hand and educational level on the other.

Non-kin

Non-kin network members are teachers, home peers and school peers. Because four children stated network members who did not fell into one of the relational levels a new group called 'others' was created. In this section the frequency of contact and educational levels of teachers will be discussed. For home peers and school peers measures on age, location, frequency of contact and educational levels are presented. With regard to others location, frequency of contact and educational levels are discussed (see Table 5).

Table 5. *Non-Kin Characteristics*

Characteristic	**Teachers**	**School peers**	**Home peers**	**Others**
Mean age	-	12.4 *(sd=1)*	13.1 *(sd=2)*	-
Location in %	-			
Same household		-	-	25
Close proximity		28.1	91.5	25
Town residence		71.9	3.4	25
Country residence		-	5.1	25
Abroad		-	-	-
Contact frequency in %				
7 times a week	6.3	24	30.5	25
4 to 6 times a week	93.8	76	11.9	50
1 to 3 times a week	-	-	52.5	-
Once a month	-	-	-	-
1 to 4 times a year	-	-	5.1	25
(almost) never	-	-	-	-
Mean educational level	2 *(sd=0)*	*1 (sd=0)*	*1.3 (sd=.7)*	2 *(sd=0)*

Non-kin network members are, compared to close and extended kin, least likely to live within the same household as ego. Non-kin network members live however close to the respondent and also interact frequently with them. When comparing home peers to school peers results showed that home peers live closer to ego and are more educated than school peers. Ego had however as much contact with home peers as with school peers. With regard to educational levels, non-kin varied from being primary to secondary educated. Teachers and others are compared to other network members the highest educated of all.

The presented results on non-kin characteristics are compared on gender and geographical location, although no gender comparisons were obtainable for teachers and others. Gender comparisons of school and home peers revealed interesting patterns. Results showed that girls live closer and interact more with school peers and boys significantly more with home peers ($t(57)$, p = .007). Furthermore, boys home peers were found to be higher educated than girls home peers. Overall, gender comparisons indicated that girls are more oriented towards school peers and boys more towards home peers.

Next to gender comparisons, non-kin characteristics were compared between urban and rural areas. Analyses revealed that respondents in rural areas have older school peers ($t(77)$, p = .000) and home peers than respondents in urban areas. Respondents in rural areas also live closer to school and home peers and are more in contact with them than respondents in urban areas. For school peers of respondents living in rural areas significant results were found for location ($t(73.9)$, p = .006) and frequency of contact ($t(62.3)$, p = .000). With regard to educational levels home peers were found to be significantly higher educated in urban areas ($t(57)$, p = .004). Overall, respondents in rural areas live closer and are more in contact with peers, although home peers are higher educated within urban networks.

Qualitative results

Importance of support

In order to examine how school support is perceived in the Burkinabe context, respondents were asked if and why social support is important. The results showed that all respondents think that giving support is important. Respondents related the importance of support strongly to reciprocity. The most frequently stated answer was that support is important because when you help somebody, they will help you too. This was mentioned eight times by boys and five times by girls. A boy at Geswende said: *'Supporting somebody is important because, because when you help somebody today, tomorrow maybe they will help you too'*. Other given answers related to God and were mentioned four times by boys and three times by girls. A boy at Evangelique de Leo said: *'Support is important because God has said to help those who are in need'*. Other stated answers were related to school or work which were mentioned respectively once and twice. So although some stated the importance of religious factors, support is mainly perceived as important because of reciprocity.

Reasons for social support

Next to the importance of support, respondents were also asked why they needed support. Evidence on why and how respondents seek support may provide insight into cultural specific aspects of seeking support and the types of support used. The results showed that respondents reasons to look

for social support varied between ´because I need something´, ´because I need support with school´ and 'because support does me good'. These answers were found to relate to instrumental support (tangible assistance), informational support (direct help with school) and emotional support (academic stimulation). The content of each support category will be discussed in reference to close kin, extended kin and non-kin. The role of each network member will be presented in order to look for specialists and generalists roles within the Burkinabe school support network.

Instrumental support: what and who?

The most often mentioned answer was to seek support in case respondents needed something. This answer was stated nine times by boys and eight times by girls. A boy at Evangelique de Benekeledaga said: *'When my parents can't pay the parental fees we are obliged to ask my little father [uncle] to help us out*'. Another example was to give material things to another person, stated three times by boys and seven times by girls. A girl at Evangelique de Salbisgo explained: *'Supporting somebody is giving things, like clothes, shoes and money'*. Comparisons on geographical location showed differences between the respondents. Respondents in rural areas stated thirteen times to look for support when in need of material things whereas in urban areas this was only mentioned four times.

Overall, close kin were the most salient providers of instrumental support. Fathers and mothers give food, clothes and shoes and take care of medical assistance and school material. This kind of support was given by seven of eleven fathers of boys and seven of eight mothers of boys. Furthermore, all fathers and mothers of girls provided instrumental support. A boy at Evangelique de Banakeledaga said: *'When I need to buy things for school and I don't have money he [my father] will buy it for me'*. Respondents stated that siblings help them with work at home or by providing school material. A boy at Evangelique de Salbisgo said: *'When I don't have copybooks or pens my brother will pay them for me'*. For brothers this was in four out five cases for boys and three out of five for girls. For sisters this was the case in three out of five sisters of boys and seven out of eight sisters of girls.

Extended kin members are found to provide almost solely instrumental support. Three out of five uncles of boys and all uncles of girls help ego by paying parental school fees, buying clothes and shoes and giving money. This was also true for all aunts. A girl at Evangelique de Leo said: *'She [my aunt] gives me clothes and money to buy copybooks with'*. Results on the role of cousins showed that all cousins of girls and boys give instrumental support. They help by providing school material and giving money. Last, grandparents were found to provide medical services, clothes, shoes and food.

Non-kin network members who provided instrumental support were school peers, home peers and one 'other'. Four out of seven school peers of boys and three out of nine school peers of girls give instrumental support, e.g. school material. They also help with doing work at home or

giving food during the school break. Two out of eight home peers of boys and one out of five home peers of girls provided instrumental support, e.g. helping with work at home.

Finally, some children were found to receive no instrumental support in certain situations. When children were asked for example who would check if they have done their homework (Appendix 2), respondents often answered 'nobody'. A girl at Wendlasida explained: *'Nobody knows if I have done my homework because my father is not there. He leaves very early in the morning and when he comes back I'm already asleep'*.

Informational support: because I need support with school

The second most often given answer of respondents was to seek support because they need support with school. This was stated seven times by boys and eight times by girls. A girl at Evangelique de Yako explained: *'I look for help when I have difficulties understanding something. For example when I have a problem with math and I can't solve it by myself'*. A girl at Wendlasida said: *'Supporting somebody is to help somebody to understand his schoolwork'.* Comparisons on geographical location showed differences between respondents living in urban and rural areas. Urban respondents stated ten times to look for school support but rural respondents only five times.

With regard to close kin, four out of seven fathers of boys and three out of eight fathers of girls provided informational support, e.g. help with homework or arrange an extra teacher. A boy at Geswende said: *'My father explains my homework but when he does not understand he asks a private teacher to help me study in the evenings'*. Boys reported that five out of eight mothers encourage them to make their homework, whereas girls reported that three out of eight mothers explain their homework to them. A girl at Geswende explained: *'My mother helps me to learn my lessons. I give her my copybook and she asks me to recite my lessons'*. Siblings are also providers of informational support. One out of five brothers of boys and three out of five brothers of girls encourage respondents to finish their lessons, explain exercises and help them to prepare their exams. A girl at Evangelique de Yako said: *'Often when I come home from school he helps me to do my exercises. For example my lessons in math and French'*. When children were given a situation in which they had trouble finishing their homework (Appendix 2), respondents also turned to their brothers. A girl at Geswende answered: *'I will go first to my older brother because he is in a higher class than me. [..] He will ask me to redo my lessons to see if I really understand it'*. Results on sisters showed that two out of five sisters of boys and four out of seven sisters of girls give informational support. A girl at Geswende said: *'She [my sister] signs my copybook. She looks at my work and my grades and then she signs for it. Also, she explains my lessons'*.

Extended kin provided no informational support, except for three out of five uncles of boys and all uncles of girls. A boy at Evangelique de Yako said: *'He [my uncle] poses me questions about my*

homework and then I have to answer'. The findings on extended kin are in contrast with non-kin network members who were all found to provide informational support to ego. Respondents argued that all teachers of girls and eight out of nine teachers of boys teach them how to read and write, teach and explain lessons, correct homework and encourage them to learn. A boy at Betsaleel explained: *'My teacher helps me a lot. He teaches me how to write in French and when I don't understand something he explains it to me'*.

With regard to school peers, five out of seven school peers of boys and seven out of nine school peers of girls provided informational support. A considerable number of respondents reported to be engaged in a 'study group'. A boy at Evangelique de Yako explained: *'We sit together under a tree and we make our lessons. Everybody has his turn to ask his questions and after we are going to memorize what we have done. Afterwards we start posing each other questions to see if he can still remember it'*. Another five out of eight for home peers of boys and two out of five for home peers of girls give informational support. A boy at Geswende stated: *'If I or one of my friends don't understand something when can ask each other. Also when I have a problem I can ask them to explain'*.

Gender differences in seeking support from peers emerged when respondents were given two examples of situations related to informational support (Appendix 2). Boys answered six times to turn to their home peers compared to one time by girls. Moreover, girls reported four times to turn to their school peers and boys only two times. A boy at Betsaleel said: *'I will go to my friends at home because normally they are good students and they will explain to me'*. A girl at Evangelique de Salbisgo explained: *'I will go to my friends at school because at home I can't ask anybody. They didn't go to school so they can't explain me how to do it'*. The results showed that girls are more likely to seek support from school peers and boys more from home peers.

Emotional support: because support does well

Respondents also reported that support is to do somebody good. A girl at Evangelique de Reo said: '*When somebody helps me that means that he is doing me good'.* This was mentioned ten times by boys and nine times by girls. Other related answers were giving advice, respecting or guiding another. A boy at Raoul Follereau summarized: *'To help is to look after somebody, to respect somebody and give him advice'*.

In reference to close kin, only girls reported that three out of eight fathers provided emotional support, e.g. giving advice to them. A girl at Evangelique de Benekeledaga said: *'My father gives me advice. He tells me to respect older people, people like my father. And he tells me to work hard at school'*. Furthermore, three out of eight mothers of boys and girls advise their children to respect others and work hard at school. A boy at Evangelique de Reo added: *'My mother supports me in that she loves me'*. When respondents were asked to who they would turn to in case of

negative feelings (Appendix 2), children sometimes specifically mentioned not to seek support from parents. A girl at Betsaleel said: *'I won't tell my father because he can become angry and he might hit me. And I don't like that'*. Furthermore, a girl at Evangelique de Reo explained: *'I won't talk to my parents when I feel sad because I don't want them to start worrying over me'*. Next to parents, siblings did not provide emotional support with the exception of one boy that reported that his twin sister accompanies him wherever he goes.

Extended kin did not offer much emotional support although small exceptions were found. One boy said that his uncle gives him advice. One girl at Betsaleel reported that her cousins give some emotional support: *'If I want advice I sometimes go to my cousins. They can tell me to continue to do my schoolwork'*. Furthermore, a girl at Raoul Follereau reported that her grandparents give emotional support: *'My grandmother tells me not do things that are bad, she warns me for that'*.

Among non-kin network members home peers were the most important emotional support providers. One out of eight home peers of boys and two out of five home peers of girls give emotional support. This support varied from accompanying somebody to giving advice. Girls also received emotional support from their teachers and school peers. Two out of seven girls reported that their teacher provided emotional support. A girl at Geswende stated: *'He [teacher] gives me advice. He tells me to finish my lessons and that I have to work hard to succeed in the future'*. Two out of nine school peers of girls also provide emotional support. A girl at Betsaleel explained: *'When I do something they don't like they will tell me not to do it again'*. Furthermore, some respondents specifically mentioned to turn to peers because they did not want to ask their parents. A girl at Evangelique de Reo said: *'I will to talk to my friends when if I feel sad because I'm not ashamed to share the whole problem with them'*. A boy at Evangelique de Leo explained: *´I will talk to my friends because I'm not afraid of them. [..] For my mother I'm afraid because she can hit me'*.

Although many respondents mentioned several network members to provide emotional support, this was mostly the case in situations with happy emotions, for example after receiving a good grade. When respondents were asked to who they would turn to when they are sad, boys and girls responded respectively two and three times nobody. A boy at Wendlasida said: *'When I tell my problems to others they will discuss it together. Me, I don't want that so I don't talk to anybody'*. Overall the results showed that emotional support is scarcely available throughout the network. Moreover, respondents are reluctant to seek support in case of negative feelings, especially from parents and instead they turn more often to peers.

Peer engagement: companionship

Besides instrumental, informational and emotional support, respondents also referred to their engagement with peers in outside school activities. These answers related to the fourth support

category 'companionship'. Home peers and school peers were found to be providers of companionship. For school peers this was the case in four out of seven school peers of boys and one out of nine school peers of girls. Respondents reported to play together during school breaks or at midday. A girl at Geswende said: *'When we have finished our lessons we are going to play together. We take a rope and go skipping'*. A boy at Evangelique de Leo stated: *'When we are free we always play football'*. Also, four out of eight home peers of boys and two out of five home peers of girls provide companionship. A boy at Evangelique de Banakeledaga explained: *'After school I will meet my friends who live near me. We will tell each other stories, what we've done at school, etc. After we are going to play football together'.* Although to a much lesser extent than peers, younger siblings also provided companionship. A girl at Raoul Follereau stated: *'I enjoy myself by playing with my little brother'*.

Respondents reported however to have little free time because they have to work outside school. This was mentioned four times by boys and nine times by girls. A girl at Betsaleel said: *'I don't have much free time because after school I have to work at home. I have to take care of my little brothers and sisters and I'm doing the dishes and washing my clothes. Also, I am not allowed to go outside. But sometimes when I have done my schoolwork and the dishes I play in the court with my little brother*'. A girl at Benekeledaga said: *'After school I am preparing dinner and I bath my little brother and myself*'. When a boy at Wendlasida was asked if he works at home, he answered: *'Sometimes I have to buy wood for my mother'*. Results on companionship revealed overall that respondents engage in free time activities with peers and younger siblings. Many respondents had however little or no time for companionship since they have to work outside school. Gender differences were found since girls were more than twice as likely to have work duties outside school as boys.

Generalist and specialist network

The results on seeking support showed that respondents look for support when they need material things, help with school or advice and guidance and engage with peers in play activities. Parents and peers are found to be the most all-round support providers whereas extended kin, except for uncles, is the most specialist by solely providing instrumental support. The results showed that especially instrumental support is broadly available within the school support network. All network members provide instrumental support to some extent. Informational support is retrieved mostly from close kin and non-kin although uncles also helped with schoolwork. Children obtained emotional support mostly from parents and peers, but in case of negative feelings children seek no support at all or turn to peers. Furthermore, peers and to a lesser extent younger siblings are found to be providers of companionship. Respondents have however little time to engage in companionship since they often

have to perform work duties. Gender comparisons revealed that girls retrieve emotional support from more network members than boys. Furthermore, girls were twice as likely to have work responsibilities and therefore engage less in companionship than boys. With regard to geographical location, results showed that instrumental support was more frequently mentioned in rural areas and informational support more frequently in urban areas.

Discussion

Previous research has discussed the positive effect of support networks on children's social and academic development (DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Sarason et al., 1983; Wentzel, 1998) and is studied in the field of social network analysis (Fischer, 1982; Pugliesi & Shook, 1998; McPherson et al., 2001; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Social network analysis argues that relationships between people are embedded within socio-cultural frameworks and focuses on the opportunities and constraints of a network and its influences on the availability of support (Wellman, 1989). Little cross-cultural research on support networks is available and has mainly been carried out in Latin-American (DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991) or Asian (French, et al., 2001; Mortenson, 1998; Taylor et al., 2004) countries. The present study examines the school support networks of Burkinabe children living in rural and urban areas of Burkina Faso, West-Africa. The aim of the study is to describe the networks in terms of size, composition, type and provision of support. Also, differences between gender and geographical location are investigated. Furthermore, this study explores the influence of cultural values and societal changes on Burkinabe school support networks.

The results of the study will be compared to results found in other literature in order to expand knowledge on the concept of cross-cultural support networks. The findings in the Burkinabe context lead to a review of three main themes: *1* cultural influences on school support networks, *2* gender differences in school support networks and *3* migration and the extended family network. Theme one will discuss cultural specific aspects of the school support network, focusing on the suitability, content and provision of support. Theme two will describe differences found between boys and girls school support networks. Last, theme three explains how school support networks are subject to large societal changes like urbanization.

Cultural influences on social support

Tietjen (1989) argues that support networks are influenced by the ecological context in which they are embedded. According to the independent-interdependent dichotomy Western cultures are generally self-oriented and Southern countries group-oriented (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994). The emphasis on the group and the presence of the extended family result in children having socio-centric self concepts (Shweder & Bourne, 1984) or a self-concept in which the self is rooted in

relationships with others (Mpofu, 2002). Tsum-Danso (2009) reasons that support in interdependent-oriented countries is common because it is rooted in reciprocity: rights or entitlements come along with duties. Other research indicates that seeking extra personal support may be less common in interdependent cultures since any effort to bring personal problems to the attention of others may risk demanding inappropriate demands on the group (Magaya et al., 2005; Park et al., 2007; Pines & Zaidman, 2003; Taylor et al., 2004). Cross-cultural research showed however also similarities in the need, importance and relevance of support (Adams et al., 2006; Pines & Zaidman, 2003). Therefore the main assumption is that cultural contexts influence but not determine how social support is perceived (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Mortenson, 2008; Pines & Zaidman, 2003; Tietjen, 1989).

The present study found evidence for this hypothesis. All participants in this study confirm the importance of support, like has been found in studies on interdependent-oriented Arabs in Israel (Pines & Zaidman, 2003). Results show however also cultural influences on the definition of support. Burkinabe children argue that support is important because of reciprocity: 'when you help another person, one day he might help you'. This study confirms therefore the suggestion of Tsum-Danso (2009) that supportive relationships in interdependent-oriented cultures are based on reciprocity. The importance of reciprocity in support relations might be an example of other-focused emotions, which are also found within interdependent-oriented cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This study shows that the importance and relevance of support is evident within the Burkinabe context, but that support is defined terms of interdependent values as reciprocity.

Content of support

Tietjen (1989) reasons that the quality of support networks must be understood in terms of cultural differences: support must comprise those types of support that are necessary in the cultural context in which a person lives. In this study school support networks of Burkinabe children were analyzed in reference to four support categories: instrumental support, informational support, emotional support and companionship. These categories are however not seen as universal norms but as broad categories that are open to different cultural interpretations. The aim of this study was to investigate the cultural interpretations of the four support categories in the Burkinabe context, which yielded interesting results on the definitions and provisions of support.

Instrumental support

Like suggested by Tietjen (1989) in her study of support networks in Papua new Guinea, the most important type of support in Burkinabe children's school support networks is instrumental support. Burkinabe children receive instrumental support from all network members, although mostly from parents and extended kin. These results confirm the importance of the extended family in providing

instrumental support like was found in studies in Zimbabwe (Harrison et al., 1997) and Tanzania (Ainsworth et al., 2000). Instrumental support in reference to the Burkinabe context could be best described as 'giving material things', e.g. food, money, clothes, shoes and school material and 'help with work', e.g. household chores. This definition seems to be in agreement with research on women's networks in Mali which distinguished material and practical support (Adams et al., 2006). The Burkinabe definition of instrumental support confirms the suggestion that in countries where poverty is high, like in Burkina Faso, children's needs are mainly material in nature. Burkinabe children in rural areas are found to receive more instrumental support than their counterparts in urban areas for example. Primary school pupils in Ghana also recognize the importance of material needs for school success (Etsey, 2005). Future research on support styles must therefore not only recognize the importance of cultural factors but also the socio-economic conditions in which instrumental support arises.

Emotional support

Research in non-African cultures proposed that although reciprocal support is common (Tsum-Danso, 2009) all extra efforts to demand emotional support are inappropriate in interdependent-oriented cultures (Mortenson, 1998; Pines & Zaidman, 2003; Taylor et al., 2004). This research partly confirms this proposition because emotional support within Burkinabe school support networks is relatively scarce. Like is found in other research (Pines & Zaidman, 2003) a considerable number of Burkinabe children seeks no emotional support. Furthermore, when Burkinabe children seek emotional support this is mainly in case of positive emotions. When feeling sad or after behaving badly they are reluctant to seek support because they are afraid of the consequences, e.g. being beaten or others worrying over them. These explanations show similarities with explanations proposed in other research, like a fear of disturbing relational harmony (Mortenson, 1998) and a reluctance to self-disclosure (Pines & Zaidman, 2003). Overall Burkinabe children seem to seek little to no emotional support from others because sharing personal problems with others unbalances the reciprocal nature of the support relationship (Tsum-Danso, 2009).

This suggestion is most apparent in ego's ties with adults and more specifically with parents. This study shows that when Burkinabe children are in need of emotional support they turn to peers instead of parents. This may be because children's emotional sharing with adults is seen as disrespectful (Tsum-Danso, 2009). Other literature suggests that because men are the head of the family it is more appropriate that children give support to their father than receive it from him (Harper & Marcus, 1999). The egalitarian character of the peer-to-peer relationship may therefore explain why Burkinabe children are more willing to share emotional feelings with peers than with parents. Future research on support relationships in interdependent-oriented cultures should more

thoroughly investigate how cultural values affect children's support seeking behavior, with special attention to the role of peers.

Finally, emotional support in reference to the Burkinabe context is defined in terms of guidance and advice. This definition seems to be influenced by cultural values as relational hierarchy. Because when emotional support is characterized as giving advice or guidance, it no longer involves challenging authority since by asking advice or guidance you both respect ánd confirm the authority of the other. The Burkinabe interpretation of emotional support based on cultural values may imply that support types are differently defined across cultures. Future research should therefore be careful in using Western definitions of emotional support in other cultural contexts and be aware of cross-cultural differences.

Informational support

Besides instrumental and emotional support, school support networks are for a large part oriented towards informational support, e.g. helping with homework and explaining lessons. Literature on learning practices in Africa indicated a hybrid learning style based on indigenous learning practices and instructional practices brought along by colonization (Nsamenang, 2003). According to Daun (2002) formal education goals strive with interdependent goals with as result that informational support is less suitable within African countries. The results of this study illustrate however the importance of informational support in Burkinabe school support networks since informational support is the second most mentioned type of support.

Research in Burkina Faso found low levels of parental involvement due to illiteracy or poor living conditions (Harting & Klompenhouwer, 2009). Since educational levels in Burkina Faso are especially low among parents and other adults (Harting & Klompenhouwer, 2009) it was hypothesized that Burkinabe children may seek informational support from others, like siblings or peers (Harper & Marcus, 1999). The results of the present study confirm this hypothesis. Educational levels of parents and other adults are low and Burkinabe children therefore receive most informational support from home peers and school peers. Some parents however do provide informational support, which may confirm the suggestion that despite low educational levels network members are willing to be involved with school (Harting & Klompenhouwer, 2009).

Furthermore, this study reveals that the availability of informational support in Burkina Faso is higher in urban areas than in rural areas. A possibility might be that material needs in rural areas are more critical than in urban areas and support networks are therefore more instrumental support oriented than informational support oriented. Higher levels of informational support in urban areas may however also be explained by higher educated network members within urban networks. Moreover, another explanation is a shift towards the adaptation of more independent-oriented

values within urban areas. This possibility will be further discussed in Theme 3 'Migration and extended family networks'. Overall future research is recommended to recognize the importance of informational support with interdependent-oriented cultures by looking beyond parental involvement and examining the role of peers. Finally, differences due to geographical location must be taken into account.

Companionship

Western literature found siblings and peers to be the most important providers of companionship (Reid et al., 1989; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Because of the relevance of child-to-child socialization in interdependent-oriented cultures (Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994) similar results might be found in Burkina Faso. The present study confirms this suggestion because home and school peers are most important in providing companionship, followed by younger siblings.

Tietjen (1989) argued that companionship is very suitable in interdependent-oriented cultures. This study shows however that Burkinabe children engage less in companionship than hypothesized because cultural values affect children's opportunity to engage in companionship. Burkinabe children have little time to play outside school since they are expected to fulfill household chores, like was suggested in research on sub-Saharan Africa (Harper & Marcus, 1999). Furthermore, some children are even forbidden to leave the house. Work responsibilities, e.g. taking care of younger siblings, and limited opportunities to engage with peers outside the household might explain why some Burkinabe children play only with their little brothers and sisters. So although this study confirms that companionship is provided by horizontal ties like peers and siblings (Hartup, 1989) it suggests simultaneously that the opportunities for companionship in Burkina Faso are limited due to children's work responsibilities. Children's conflicting responsibilities outside school should therefore be taken into account in future research.

Generalist and specialist support providers

Wellman and Wortley (1990) argue that support networks may be *general* in that ego can retrieve all types of support from multiple network members and *specialist* in that ego can only obtain specific types of support from certain network members. In agreement with expectations based on Western (Reid et al., 1989; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) and comparative research (DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991) parents of Burkinabe children are multiple support providers. This study also shows that peers are equally or even more all-round support providers than parents. This finding is in contrast with literature which indicates that children living in interdependent-oriented cultures are more kin than peer-oriented (DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991). DeRosier and Kupersmidt (1991) argue that Costa Rican children prefer kin over peers because of interdependent values. Do Burkinabe children's

supportive ties with peers then necessarily reflect a loss of interdependent-oriented values? This study argues no, because due to the continuing importance of interdependent values kin is less likely to provide informational or emotional support (Mortenson, 2008; Taylor et al., 2004). Burkinabe children therefore establish or reinforce ties with peers because they do offer these types of support. This proposal is in line with Granovetter (1983) who suggests that weak ties are reinforced to obtain types of support which are not broadly available among strong ties. In the Burkinabe context peers are therefore equally or even more important support providers than parents. Future research should take this possibility into account when examining children's support seeking behavior.

Whereas parents and peers are found to be all-round support providers, extended kin is found to be a specialist support provider. This finding may be in contrast with indications that extended kin is very important within interdependent-oriented cultures (Harrison et al., 1997; Lloyd & Blanc, 1996). The importance of extended kin in Burkinabe school support networks can however be confirmed since all children reported to seek support from extended kin. So although close kin, extended kin and non-kin are all important within Burkinabe school support networks, close kin and non-kin are generalist have general roles and extended kin specialist roles.

Gender differences in school support networks

Gender is found to be an important determinant in the size and composition of support networks (Belle, 1989; Nsamenang and Lamb, 1994; Tietjen, 1989). Nsamenang and Lamb (1994) argue for example that children in Cameroun from an early age on participate in gender-divided activities. This study investigates which cultural values affect boys' and girls' school support networks in Burkina Faso and discusses its consequences on the availability of support.

Same-sex networks

Gender is a strong divider of social networks since most egos prefer same-sex alters, resulting in primarily male support networks for men and female support networks for women (Belle, 1989; Fischer, 1982; McPherson et al., 2001). The establishment of same-sex ties is especially likely to arrive in gender segregated contexts (McPherson et al., 2001). Since social life in sub-Saharan Africa is strongly gendered (Ansell, 2005) a high number of same-sex ties within support networks seems credible. This study indeed found that boys support networks consist mostly of men and girls networks mostly of women. This finding is in line with research in Israel where girls were found to rely most upon sisters and mothers instead of male network members (Pines & Zaidman, 2003). Based on the study of McPherson et al. (2001) a possible explanation for the high number of same-sex ties may be the gender segregated context in which children are embedded. Also, hierarchical differences between men and women may prevent children to look for support in other-sex network

members (Ansell, 2005). These explanations seem plausible within interdependent-oriented cultures, but more cross-cultural research on gender differences is necessary to further investigate which cultural values explain same-sex orientations within support networks.

Network sizes

Previous literature suggests that girls network sizes are smaller because girls opportunities to establish ties with others are more limited than those of boys (Harper & Marcus, 1999). This study reveals that Burkinabe girls indeed have smaller school support networks than boys, which is mostly due to boys having more peers in their network than girls. It seems that girls opportunities to establish ties with peers are limited because of their work responsibilities (Harper & Marcus, 1999). Burkinabe girls perform more household chores than boys, including washing the dishes, washing clothes or taking care of younger siblings. This suggestion is confirmed by results showing that Burkinabe girls have especially less home peers within their network. This might indicate that girls, due to their high amount of work within the household, are more bound to the house and have less access to peers within their home environment. Burkinabe girls indeed live closer and interact more frequently with school peers than home peers.

Furthermore, the results on Burkinabe children also support the suggestion that girls tend to rely more upon kin and boys more upon non-kin because girls spend more time in and around the house, whereas boys are freer to explore beyond the house (Ansell, 2005; Harper & Marcus, 1999; Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994). Overall, greater work responsibilities of girls limit their ties with peers and make them more dependent on kin support. Although there is no clear evidence that large networks provide better or more support (Vaux & Harrison, 1985) girls limited access to other people also results in a loss of home peers within the network. The situation of girls demands therefore special attention, since home peers are found to be important all-round support providers.

Migration and the extended family network

The extended family is one among many cultural factors which influences the school support networks of children in interdependent-oriented cultures (Magaya et al., 2005; Kağitçibaşi, 1996; Russell, 2003; Tietjen, 1989). This study also provides evidence for the presence of the extended family since most parents, siblings, uncles, aunts and cousins and to a lesser extent grandmothers live within the same households as Burkinabe children.

The existence of the extended family is however found to be influenced by societal changes like urbanization by which the extended family slowly becomes replaced by the nuclear family (Aldous, 1962; Bongaarts, 2001; Swadener et al., 2000; Anijas & De Bruin, 2009). Research suggests that due to these changes familial responsibilities are more seen in terms of the nuclear family with

extended kin providing less support to their kin than before (Tibajiuka & Kaijage, 1995). The present study also reveals differences in the presence of the extended family between urban and rural areas. Children living in rural areas, despite comparable network sizes, have more extended kin within their school support network than children living in urban areas. This may indicate that urbanization indeed influences the function of the extended family like is found in other African research (Annijas & De Bruin, 2009; Harrison et al., 1997; Russell, 2003).

Kağitçibaşi (1996) argues however that African countries develop an 'extended modified family' based on both traditional and modern values. Evidence is found in Uganda where the Buganda lives in nuclear households and simultaneously has extended social networks (Annijas & De Bruin, 2009). Research in South-Africa also showed that urban black families created family norms based on traditional and modern standards (Russell, 2003). This study shows that Burkinabe children in urban areas have many extended kin within their school support networks and therefore supports the hypothesis that extended kin bonds continue to exist. It is however true that children in urban areas do have more close kin and non-kin within their network compared to extended kin. Overall these results indicate that kin-bonds continue to exist but become loser, like suggested in previous research (Harrison et al., 1997; Höllinger & Haller, 1990; McPherson et al., 2001). Overall the family arrangements of Burkinabe children living in urban areas are an example of a 'modified extended family' as suggested by Kağitçibaşi (1996).

Since the modified extended family entails a different network composition the content of support may change as well. Due to new family arrangements the economic function of the extended family is thought to be loosening which results in low instrumental support levels among extended kin (Kağitçibaşi, 1996). In this study extended kin within urban networks still provide instrumental support although to a lesser extent than in rural areas. This may indicate that although the instrumental function of the extended family continues to exist, it indeed becomes less important within urban areas. Where literature expects instrumental support to decrease, informational support is thought to increase. Smaller family sizes and the adaptation of more independent values may reduce the gap between home and school (Nsamenang, 2003; Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994) which facilitates the provision of informational support. This study shows that Burkinabe children in urban areas indeed obtain more informational support than children in rural areas. More research is however needed in order to determine if the shift towards informational support is due to adaptation of independent values. These results might also be explained by higher educational levels in urban areas. Emotional support was also hypothesized to gain in importance because within modified extended family arrangements seeking emotional support from others could be less a threat for social harmony than before (Taylor et al., 2004). This study shows that interdependent values like strong family bonds and interrelatedness continue to exist in urban areas and therefore

emotional support is still scarce. Overall it seems that although there is evidence for the modified extended family in urban areas, interdependent values continue to influence to a large extent the provision and availability of instrumental, informational and emotional support.

Conclusion

This research attempted to answer several questions: how can Burkinabe school support networks in rural and urban areas of Burkina Faso be described in terms of size, composition, type and provision of support? Second, how do school support networks in Burkina Faso differ with respect to gender and geographical location? Finally, the implications of these results for the influence of cultural values and changing family systems on Burkinabe school support networks were examined.

It can be concluded that school support networks of Burkinabe children are to a large extent influenced by the cultural context in which they are embedded. The characteristics and content of the school support network are shaped in a way which helps children develop those skills that are necessary to be a competent person according to their specific cultural context. There are three main cultural influences which affect the school support network of Burkinabe children.

First, interdependent-oriented values make that children are to some extent reluctant to seek support from their network members, especially elder people. Explanations vary from a fear of disturbing group harmony and showing disrespect to elders which is followed by harsh consequences. Second, cultural values recognize the work responsibilities of Burkinabe children which limits them in their opportunity to establish supportive ties with others, especially with peers. Third, cultural values are simultaneously subject to societal changes. Traditional living arrangements like the extended family are slowly converging into more nuclear family arrangements, like the modified extended family. These three main aspects, in combination with poor socio-economic conditions and low educational levels within support networks, determine the definition, availability and provision of support within children's school support networks in Burkina Faso.

First of all, school support networks in Burkina Faso are mainly equipped to provide instrumental support, e.g. giving material things or helping with work. Second, companionship is very limited due to children's high workloads. This accounts especially to girls who are more likely to work and less likely to establish ties with peers. Third, informational support is only limited available within the school support network by which children are obliged to 'shop around' in order to look for help with schoolwork, often found with peers or teachers. Fourth, emotional support is scarce within the school support networks of Burkinabe children since children are afraid of seeking emotional support because this strives with traditional values. This might explain why emotional support is more defined in terms of advice and guidance within the Burkinabe context. This new definition of

emotional support does not undermine traditional values like respecting elders since by asking advice or guidance you both respect and confirm the authority of the other. Finally, due to urbanization the extended family becomes replaced in urban areas by the modified extended family. The school support network simultaneously becomes more oriented towards non-kin, although in contrast with nuclear family styles, family bonds with extended kin continue to exist.

Limitations

The school support networks of Burkinabe children were examined using a mixed-method approach which contributes to the relevance and validity of the study. In obtaining qualitative data results on quantitative measurements as network size and network composition could be more in-depth analyzed and cultural specific aspects explored. Some limitations must however be acknowledged. First, selection bias is possible since no random selection procedure has been used. The research has been carried out in collaboration with CREDO and therefore only primary schools where CREDO's sponsorship program has been implemented were visited. The headmasters of each participating school selected two children from the highest grade to participate. It may well be possible that headmasters selected children who they thought were most suitable to participate by which the possibility arises that some children were less likely than others to be selected. Future research could suggest letting the researcher randomly select two 6th grade children from each school to avoid the above mentioned problems. Furthermore, CREDO has implemented the sponsorship program only in four regions of Burkina Faso and the sample does not represent the whole Burkinabe population. Also, all children who participated in this study were sponsored by CREDO because they come from low-income families with little financial resources. The sample therefore must be carefully generalized to other (non-sponsored) children elsewhere in Burkina Faso or to children coming from families with more financial resources.

Second, one of the disadvantages of social network analysis is the duration of the interviews with frequent repetitions of questions. The total data collection comprised about two hours which may have been long and boring for the respondents. Therefore they may have given incomplete answers or leave out examples which negatively influenced the validation of the study.

Third, all interviews were in principle conducted in French by the researcher. Children were frequently asked whether they understood the question which in general was the case. Some children however had difficulty in expressing themselves in French and preferred, as was suggested throughout the interview, to answer in either Mooré or Dioula. The answers were subsequently translated into French by the interpreter. Although the interpreter was fully informed about the topic of the interview some cultural expressions may have become lost in translation.

Fourth, status differences between the interviewer and the respondents must be addressed. Children's perceptions of the interviewer being higher in status may have influenced the reliability of respondents answers. Efforts were made to make the respondents feel at ease. Children were welcomed in their local language and were asked some off-topic questions beforehand in order to get acquainted with them. These measures contributed to a more equalitarian relationship between researcher and respondent.

Recommendations

In this section an overview of several recommendations for policy practice will be provided based on the main results of this study. These suggestions may be valuable for future programs of CREDO and its objective to increase in poverty living children's access to good primary education.

Examining school support networks

This research illustrates the relevance of social network analysis in studying school support. Results showed how children receive support from close kin, extended kin an non-kin and therefore policy programs must focus on all supportive people with whom children have ties. Although the role of close kin is important, support systems extend beyond parents and siblings. In this study the role of extended kin and non-kin have been acknowledged by children: not one child mentioned solely close kin as support providers. A possible advantage of an orientation on school support networks, instead of parental involvement for example, is that by studying school support networks it is possible to examine whether certain types of support are perhaps provided by other network members. This research shows how informational support is difficult to retrieve from parents since they are often illiterate but also how children turn to siblings or peers to seek help with their schoolwork. In other words, when examining the total support environment of children one is able to see how social support is distributed throughout the network and thereby may objectively conclude whether a child has sufficient access to support.

Importance of peer-to-peer support

Peers, both in the home and school environment, are very important support providers for Burkinabe children. Moreover, they are together with parents the most important support providers. Therefore more attention should be given to the role of peers in the academic lives of children and how peer-to-peer support is been practiced in everyday contexts. Many children formed 'study groups' with their peers during the school break at midday, after school or at their days off. In group context they explain each other exercises, make their homework or question each other on new-learned topics. The existence of these study groups illustrates the importance of peers for children's academic

development. Policy programs may further investigate this concept and expand traditional policy programs focused on parental involvement by designing policies on peer education. A suggestion for future policy could be to expand the usage of these study groups in order to create more opportunities for children to seek informational support. Furthermore, since children have equal power relationships with peers they are also more willing to share their negative feelings with other peers than parents or other higher status adults. Peers deliver an all-round support contribution towards each other which must be acknowledged and incorporated into present policy practices.

Work responsibilities of children

Burkinabe children were found to experience a variety of constraints in establishing an all-round support network. Especially children's work responsibilities outside school demand serious reconsiderations in designing future policy. After long school days children perform multiple household chores, like searching firewood, washing the dishes, washing their clothes or taking care of their younger siblings. These work responsibilities constrain children in establishing ties with peers because work makes them home-bound and dependent on kin. This could have detrimental effects on children since peers often provide those types of support that kin is least equipped to provide, e.g. informational and emotional support. Special attention must be given to the situation of girls, who are more than twice as likely to perform work outside-school and have significantly less peers in their network as boys. Some girls were even found to have no peers within the home environment and are thereby missing out on instrumental, informational, emotional support and companionship. So in order to promote children's academic development policy must acknowledge children's conflicting responsibilities and its constraints on the availability of support.

Societal changes

This research illustrated that extended family arrangements are subject to large societal changes like urbanization. The traditional extended family is found to become replaced by the modified extended family in urban areas. Within the modified extended family extended kin has a less important role which consequently influences the composition of children school support networks. Children living in urban areas rely more upon non-kin whereas children living in rural areas, within traditional extended families, rely more upon kin. In order to develop effective policy measures differences between urban and rural areas must be taken into account. With regard to school support networks policy programs in rural areas could focus more on kin and programs in urban areas more on non-kin.

Conclusion

Children's school support networks in Burkina Faso are to a large extent influenced by societal and cultural factors. Support in general and support types separately are defined by interdependent

values as respect, relational hierarchy and group harmony. Future efforts on school support networks in Burkina Faso must therefore recognize the cultural context in which networks are embedded by respecting underlying cultural values and societal changes.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Topic list name generator and semi-structured interview

Background information child

- Age
- Grade
- Domicile

Name generator

- Who helps you with school, both at school and at home ? Who helps with everything you have to do for school?
    a. How do you know this person? How are you related to this person?
    b. How old is this person?
    c. Where does this person live?
    d. Does this person goes / went to school? If yes, until which grade?
    e. How often do you see this person?

2. Interview
    a. We have talked about everybody who might help you with school. Can you tell me what it means 'to help somebody?'
    b. Is it important to know persons who might help you? If yes, why is it important?
    c. When do you ask somebody to help you? Can you give me an example?

    d. If … (nr 1) helps you, what does he / she do?
    e. What is he / she going to say to you?
    f. If you need help, you always go to this person?
    g. To whom would you go otherwise to seek help?

Appendix 2. Support examples

Informational support examples

a. When you come home from school you school and you want to ask anybody about something new you learned that day. For example because you would like to ask some questions. To whom would you go?
b. If you have to do your homework but you have difficulty finishing it, to whom would you go to help you?

Instrumental support examples

c. When you wake up in the morning and you are about to leave for school you find out that you're copybook is missing. Who would you ask to help you look for it?
d. If your teacher asks you to let somebody check if you have made your homework. Who would you ask to check it for you? Is there somebody who checks if you have made it?

Emotional support examples

e. If you come home from school and you would like to tell someone what you've done at school, to who would you go tell it?
f. If you are unhappy or sad because something bad happened at school, would you go tell someone what is bothering you? If yes, to who would you go and why? If no, why wouldn't you tell anybody?
g. Is something good happened at school, you received a good grade for example. Would you go tell it to somebody? To who and why?

Companionship

h. If you are at school and there is a short break, what are you going to do?
i. If you come home after school or you don't have to go to school, what are you going to do?
j. Are you going to play with others?
k. Are you going to work?
l. What kind of work and / or play do you do?