



Shrinking labour geographies: Transport access for paid work in later ages

Prajwal Nagesh^{a,b}, Ajay Bailey^{a,*}, Sobin George^b, Lekha Subaiya^c

^a Department of Human Geography and Spatial Planning, Utrecht University, Utrecht, the Netherlands

^b Centre for Study of Social Change and Development, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru, India

^c Population Research Centre, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru, India

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ABSTRACT

Background and objectives: In developing countries, a substantial share of the older population is employed (WHO, 2007), which is anticipated to triple between 2020 and 2050, bolstered by the rise of bridge employment in later life. Bridge jobs are part-time, informal work arrangements that serve as a transitional phase between full-time employment and retirement. While transport access for older adults is a primary policy concern in the age-friendly cities framework, their experiences of encountering and negotiating labour geographies, particularly transport systems to access bridge employment, are understudied.

Research design and methods: This paper used a qualitative and interpretative approach to analyse how older adults engage in nonlinear work patterns and commute to workspaces. We use a combination of visual mapping, observations, and in-depth interviews with older adults in Bengaluru, an urban metropolis in southern India.

Results: Older workers engage in regular mobility routines to access informal bridge jobs. Our results suggest that the precarity of their bridge jobs permeates into their mobilities. Class, gender, and spatialities create additional layers of barriers to their already constrained transport resources. Economically disadvantaged older individuals encountered shrinking labour geographies due to unaffordable public transportation and first-and-last-mile journeys. For reasons of safety, older women were forced to depend on shared and public transport options, which were often unreliable. Lastly, older workers residing in geographically marginalised areas find more difficulty in organising transport to bridge jobs.

Discussion and implications: Bridge jobs in informal arrangements are important means of livelihood for older persons in countries like India. Apart from the already precarious working conditions, the weak systemic transport support induces strain on the working conditions of older workers. From the purview of labour geography, adding to the natural limits of ageing, induced limits such as ageism and precarity at workplaces and non-age-friendly transport infrastructure create situations of vulnerable employment among older adults in the cities of the Global South.

1. Introduction

With the ascendance of neo-liberal discourses about active ageing (Schwanen et al., 2012b), geographical gerontology has witnessed research responding to the positive turn through concepts such as 'successful ageing' and 'productive ageing' (Feng and Phillips, 2022; Hardill and Baines, 2009; Hinterlong et al., 2001). Amidst the increased research on older adults' participation in socio-economic activities, there is a growing recognition that work in later age and retirement is more 'blurred' and 'fuzzy' than ever (Alpass, 2015). In the last few decades, working lives, the nature of work and pathways to retirement have undergone rapid transformation and have majorly influenced

labour geographies (Curl and Musselwhite, 2018). The work-life continuum, non-linearity of later age work and retirement have implications on physical access to 'bridge jobs.' Bridge jobs are part-time employment arrangements that serve as a transitional phase between full-time employment and retirement (Shultz, 2003).

In developing regions, a large proportion of the older population is in active employment (WHO, 2007), and the over-55 working population is projected to triple between 2020 and 2050 (Harasty and Ostermeier, 2020, p. 5). In India, more than 36 percent of older adults are currently employed (LASI, 2020). Reddy and Goli (2023) note that the labour force participation rate of older adults in India surpasses that of numerous developing countries and a few developed countries. Labour

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: a.bailey@uu.nl (A. Bailey).

market participation is notably high among older adults living under socio-economic restrictions such as marginalised castes (LASI, 2020; Reddy and Goli, 2023) and apartheid-induced systems (Lam et al., 2006). The lack of universal social security compels older adults to undertake labour amidst ageism and economic precarity (Singh et al., 2015). For instance, around 88 percent of India's workforce is employed in unorganised sectors and is not covered by any employment-related pension schemes (OECD, 2019). Pension coverage is sparse and covers only 12 percent of older men and 3 percent of older women (LASI, 2020). In this context, paid work is often a forced reality due to rising medical and living expenditures (Giridhar et al., 2014; HelpAge India report, 2022; Reddy and Goli, 2023).

However, geographical gerontologists have not devoted enough attention to later-age labour geographies as much as they have for 'health geographies' (Skinner et al., 2015) and the 'landscapes of care' (Milligan and Wiles, 2010). Extant literature focuses on the 'contribution' of later-age work (Skinner et al., 2015) but seldom on labour geographies beyond 'factory gates' (Dutta, 2016). There is inadequate empirical data, particularly from developing countries, to understand if and how older workers, often resource-poor, navigate these work geographies. Given that cities of the Global South are simultaneously experiencing the dominant trends of ageing and urbanisation, there is a greater demand for enabling transport infrastructure to be age-friendly (Jahangir et al., 2022; Munshi et al., 2018). Transport researchers have pointed to certain technologies and geographical localities that heighten immobility for older adults (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Wood and Graham, 2006). Furthermore, they argue that opportunities for older adults to commute to workplaces, volunteer, and other caregiving activities are vital yet under-studied (WHO, 2007; Webber et al., 2010; Ziegler and Schwanen, 2011).

In this paper, we contribute to the growing literature on geographical gerontology with an explicit focus on transport to access workspaces. Given the patchwork transport infrastructure of developing nations like India, observing narratives of everyday journeys and negotiations with transport infrastructure aids in the development of policies for age-friendly cities. In line with Dutta's (2016) argument, we believe qualitative life stories are integral to understanding everyday labour geographies. We have used a qualitative and interpretive approach to observe how different socio-economic variables impact an older worker's experiences of ageing and mobility in everyday journeys to productive labour in Bengaluru, India. In low- and middle-income countries, older persons are more mobile than ever, but barriers, including long-term health difficulties and urban gentrification, need to be studied to understand transport-related exclusion (Curl and Musselwhite, 2018; Lucas, 2011; Munshi et al., 2018). Hence, this paper, alongside transport barriers, also focuses on older individuals' capacities, skills, and negotiations while commuting to participate in labour markets.

2. Conceptualising transport and ageing geographies for later age employment

2.1. Bridge employment

Social gerontology, starting with Robert Havighurst since the 1960s, has witnessed an ascendance of concepts such as 'active ageing', 'successful ageing' and 'productive ageing', extending the long tradition of activity theory (Bengtson and Settersten, 2016; WHO, 2002). These concepts emerged from the focus on socio-economic engagement in later life, as did the earliest theories of ageing, such as disengagement and activity theories (Butler and Gleason, 1985; Hinterlong et al., 2001). Similarly, studies argue that in the past three decades, retirement is not seen as a distinct event but a dynamic process in later ages (Wang et al., 2014). The fuzziness between 'retirement' and 'work' is evident in the recognition of bridge jobs which often act as 'bridges' between full-time employment and full-time retirement. The categorisation of bridge

occupations into two main types, namely career consistent (voluntary) and different career (sustenance), also provides insights into the underlying motivations that drive older adults' participation in such employment opportunities (Alcover et al., 2014; Zhan and Wang, 2015).

This paper focuses primarily on sustenance bridge jobs, which often are informal work engagements. Other common elements of sustenance bridge jobs are reduced working hours, lower workload, fewer responsibilities, temporary or no contracts and obviously lower status and pay (Atchley and Barusch, 2004). These work engagements are often rooted in the informal sector and can also take the form of self-employment (e.g., street vending, smaller retail stores). Whether later-age employment is healthy or harmful is a vital social policy question (United Nations, 2023) but not the focus of this paper. In Fig. 1, we depict the complex interplay of push factors and the pathways that direct older adults to bridge jobs. As Dingemans et al. (2016) argue, it is a complex set of personal, financial and social situations determining access to bridge jobs (See Fig. 1). However, physical access, mobilities and the impact of place are seldom part of access to work discourses.

2.2. Labour geographies and mobilities

Geographers have had a longstanding interest in the spatialities of ageing, particularly the implications of uneven access to services and place-embeddedness (Andrews et al., 2007; Harper and Laws, 1995; Rowles, 1978). Cutchin et al. (2018) argue that models, frameworks, and theories from geographies are yet to be optimally utilised in geographical gerontology. The landmark review by Harper and Laws (1995) followed by Skinner et al. (2015) testifies to the slow and uneven distribution of geographies of ageing. In their review, Harper and Laws (1995) outline the close engagement of political economy with the social construction of ageing. They suggest deeper engagement with ageing and class struggles, pension systems and the role of private and public employers in determining the geographies of later age. Except for a few (Estes, 2000; Walker, 1981), gerontologists and geographers have limited engagement thus far with the political economy of ageing and the systemic reasons for inequality and poverty in later age. The geographer's attention to care landscapes and medical-history geography (Skinner et al., 2015) have yet to be provided for labour geographies.

Schwanen et al. (2012b) note that the neo-liberal discourses of active ageing have brought the aspects of later age mobilities and independence as modern ideals, particularly the call for older adults' participation in socio-economic and cultural activities to the forefront (Danson and Gilmore, 2012; WHO, 2002). Labour geographies have mainly been studied from a collective sense of labour movements, distribution, and migration. However, the everyday mobilities beyond factory gates to access these spaces are understudied (Dutta, 2016). There is a growing concern among social policymakers for equitable access to work (United Nations, 2023). Transport geographers have explored the links between ageing, transport inequalities and quality of life (Banister and Bowling, 2004; Curl et al., 2014; Franke et al., 2019; Metz, 2000; Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010). Even among travel destinations accessed in later life, access to work has remained underexplored as compared to health and neighbourhood essentials (Barman and Mishra, 2021; Curl et al., 2014; Schwanen et al., 2012a). Foregrounding the need for a systemic, empirical approach, this paper focuses on a set of research questions to understand the fuzzy nature of work and retirement and the everyday transport access to these bridge workspaces. We aim to understand, a) Within what context do older adults commute to bridge jobs? b) What is the impact of class and gender on labour geographies? c) What transport strategies do older workers employ to navigate these geographies?

3. Empirical context

3.1. Bengaluru: contextualising transport inequalities

In 2011, older adults (50 years and above) formed 14.9 percent (8.72

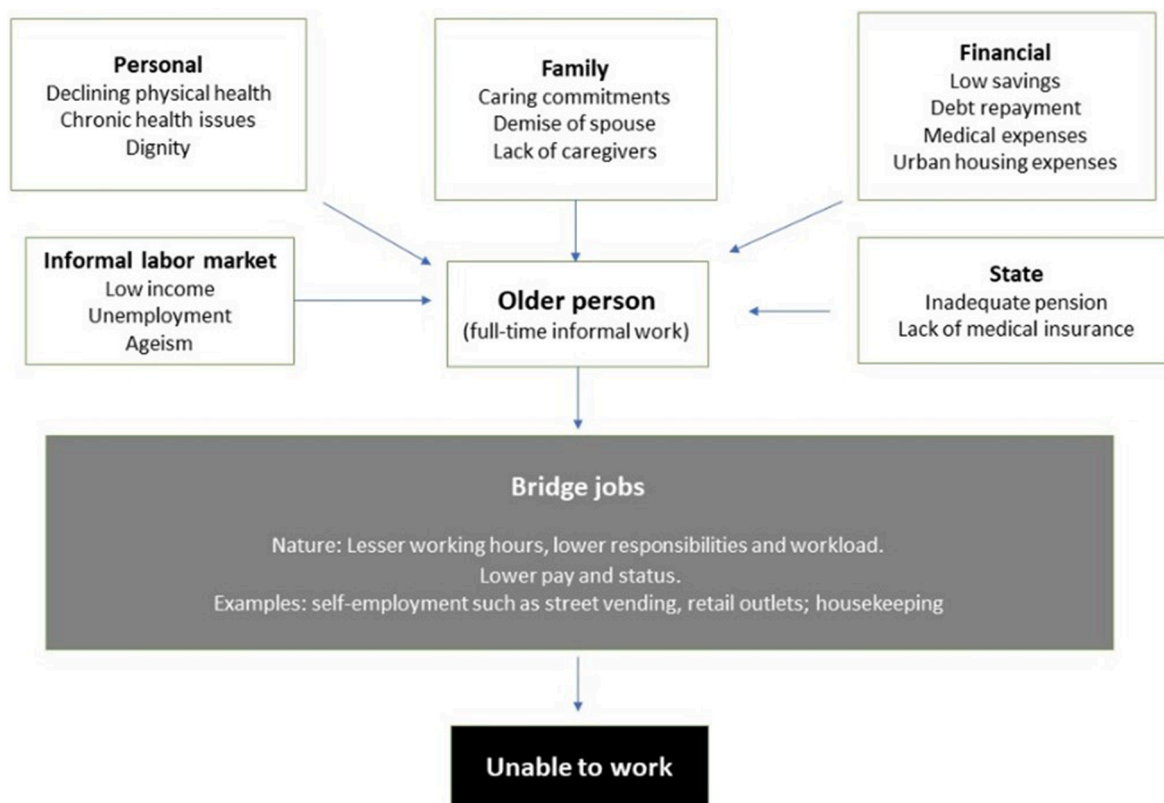


Fig. 1. Factors influencing older adults to engage in bridge jobs. Source: Author's conceptualisation from qualitative analysis and review of the literature (Shultz, 2003; Alcover et al., 2014; Dingemans et al., 2016).

million) of Bengaluru urban district's population (Census of India, 2011). Bengaluru was famously credited with the sobriquet of 'Pensioner's paradise' due to its salubrious climatic conditions and the presence of public sector enterprises that led to retired older workers settling in the city (Sudhira et al., 2007). Contrary to the retirement narrative, the Census of India (2011) data suggest that close to 0.55 million older adults are currently categorised as working.¹ Further, the recent HelpAge India report (2022), drawing on their survey data, noted that 44.5 percent of Bengaluru's 'elderly' reported being engaged in paid labour, which was the second highest nationally and well above the national average of 27.6 percent. Their report highlighted the rising economic insecurity due to healthcare costs, insufficient pension and savings and paucity of employment opportunities, leading to accepting work in precarious conditions (HelpAge India report, 2022). While the precarity of later-age informal work (RoyChowdhury, 2021) is well studied, the aspect of physical access to work through transport infrastructure is often missed in Bengaluru's narrative of 'Silicon Valley' and 'regime of congestion' (Gopakumar, 2020).

In recent decades the city has been struggling to provide basic transport infrastructure and services (Sudhira et al., 2007), particularly for older adults. Older adults in Bengaluru have witnessed increased crime rates (Jigalikoppa, 2021), particularly older women have been regular victims of chain snatching (Mishra and Patel, 2013; Swamy, 2020) and are often subject to road crashes (Agarwal, 2021). According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, among older adults, road crashes are the second most (23 percent) leading cause of death (NCRB, 2018). Bengaluru was the most traffic-congested city globally, with the influx of a record number of automobile vehicles (Tom Tom Index, 2020). Recent mobility studies, particularly Gopakumar's (2020)

work, point towards Bengaluru's 'techno solutions' offered for the 'automobile regime' to increase vehicular speed. However, the issue of safe mobility of many groups, particularly the risks older adults face while commuting, is seldom focused on in Bengaluru's transport projects and policies (Comprehensive Mobility Plan, 2020).

4. Data and methods

4.1. Study design

Ageing and mobility experiences are context specific. Older adults' biographical situation, socio-economic position, and transport resources play a significant role in shaping these experiences, which demand a qualitative inquiry. Our objective was to determine the influencing factors that impacted older adults' access to bridge jobs, the complexities of barriers and the subtleties of their mobility behaviour. We focused on how the mobility resources, barriers encountered, and coping strategies shaped their access to these economic geographies in the city of Bengaluru. For this, an interpretive paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008) was vital to explore older adults' perspectives about work at later age and transport access. For instance, we focused on eliciting *their* motivations to work, *their* experiences commuting to the workplace and *their* interpretation of barriers and solutions.

4.2. Data collection

The sampling strategy consisted of the following approach – we reached out to two non-profit organisations based in Bengaluru, which closely work with older adults from low-income and marginalised groups. We then further snowballed from the participants to identify other interested participants. We included older adults across socio-economic strata to understand the influences of gender, class and spatiality on transport choices.

¹ Census of India defines category of working as including main workers, marginal workers and those seeking or available for work.

We use a combination of in-depth interviews with older adults, visual mapping and observations. Sixty semi-structured, in-depth telephonic (audio) interviews (see Appendix 1) were conducted with older adults (50–85 years) between June and November 2020. Of the sixty participants, forty-four interviews were in the local language of *Kannada*, fourteen in English and two were in *Tamil*, a language spoken in the neighbouring state. On average, the duration of the interviews was close to an hour. In line with the COVID-19 lockdown protocols, the interviews were conducted remotely by the first author, who has lived in the city for the past few decades and has local knowledge to visualise the barriers or places mentioned by participants. Though the study's time-frame coincided with COVID-19 lockdowns, the inquiry of travel experiences primarily focused on pre-COVID mobility behaviours and experiences of older adults.

The participants comprised 26 women and 34 men, and their average age was 65 years. Access to employment-linked social security is crucial to understand the context under which older adults seek bridge jobs. So, if we categorise the list of participants from the nature of previous employment based on pension facility, the distribution of our sample of sixty older adults is as follows: 31 had formal employment with a pension, 26 had informal employment without a pension, and three were homemakers (see Appendix 1). However, the purpose of our sampling was not to be representative; rather, it was to illustrate the variety of experiences. Some of the transport zones surrounding residences and workplaces that were the subject of interviews were the focus of visual mapping and observations. Visual mapping (Hamilton, 2006; Sanoff, 2016) and prolonged observations helped understand traffic patterns, design barriers and the older adult's interaction with existing infrastructure (see Fig. 2).

The cut-off age of 50 and older was based on two arguments: first, understanding ageing as a process from a life course perspective (Bengtson and Settersten, 2016) was necessary to capture transitions that set in even before the pre-retirement phase. Second, in developing countries, existing literature suggests that non-communicable diseases (NCDs) typically present around 55 years of age (Siegel et al., 2014; WHO, 2015). For these reasons, it was vital not to miss out on the mobility experiences in this continuum of pre-to post-retirement phases.

The study design was approved by the institutional ethics committee at both the funding institution and the research partner institution in Bengaluru. The audio files were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. Participants were briefed about the details of the research study, aims and objectives. Consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were not compromised at any stage of the research. All identifying information of the participants have been redacted from the transcripts, and pseudonyms have been used.

4.3. Analysis of data

The principles of grounded theory have been the guiding lens for deriving codes, categories and themes. Using Nvivo 12 software, open coding was carried out in the first cycle for theoretical possibilities (Saldana, 2021). This cycle covered both deductive and inductive codes. The deductive codes emerged from domains such as situational factors, individual factors and the transport infrastructure of the conceptual framework (see Fig. 1). Axial coding was done to draw connections between the different codes. Themes were then generated from these assembled codes. Some key themes of class, gender and spatialities have been elaborated on and explained in the results section. Excerpts from the interview and visual maps were used to create mobility maps (see Fig. 2) using QGIS software.

4.4. Limitations

The methods used in this research, the telephonic interview and visual mapping, are not representational but engage with the range of experiences of ageing and transport to work. Remote interviews

prevented the researcher from immediately engaging with the socio-economic position (e.g., clothing, housing condition) to ask for context-specific coping methods until later in the session. The non-verbal cues could not be ascertained during these interviews. However, prolonged conversations, probing, and visual mapping of the location mentioned in the interviews helped us understand the geographical contexts of the responses.

5. Findings

The following sections discuss the context of later-age navigations for work. They dwell on the geographies of ageing and transportation, the obstacles encountered, and the coping strategies utilised while travelling to access paid labour.

5.1. Class: precarity and transport affordability

The precarity of later-age finances set a vital context for understanding the older population's needs and mobilities to bridge jobs. Informal² bridge work was found to be a significant part of older adult participants' life and routine in low-income urban settlements. We asked Lakshamma, (60 years old, domestic help), despite having to limp to work, why she still works even beyond the traditional retirement age. She quickly retorts, "How can we sit without working? If we work, we have food or else nothing,". The interviews indicated that economic sustenance, given the paltry, infrequent state-provided pension of INR³ 1000 per month (approx. US \$13) alongside the pressure to repay loans, usually borrowed for children's wedding or healthcare, required a regular income (see Fig. 1).

Participants' descriptions of their families bring nuance to the traditional belief of inter-generational solidarity (Bengtson and Roberts, 1991; Hendricks and Yoon, 2006). The affection, social ties and respect remained strong between immediate family and low-income older adults. However, children and their families were unable to share material resources or provide substantial financial support. Due to the traditional norms of patriarchy, the son is expected to be the caretaker of older parents. However, older adults expressed that their son working in the informal sector struggled to manage monthly household expenses of rent, service bills and his children's education. Hence, he was unable to provide significant financial support to his parents. Despite residing in the same house or on the same street, many older adults desired to "remain independent from the family" by continuing to work. For instance, Chandramma, unmarried, travelled by public bus, worked as a cook to not depend on her sister; Lakshamma, a widow, walked to work as domestic help and did not depend on her daughters living in the neighbourhood, and Musaab drove auto-rickshaw to support his separated daughter's family.

While work at a later age was sought for financial sustenance and dignity, older informal sector workers complained that not all jobs were open to them due to their declining physical abilities. Ageism was embedded in the labour market, influencing which jobs, work timings and types of work were available for older workers (HelpAge India report, 2022). There was pressure for older workers to 'adjust' their commutes to current work opportunities, which were low-paying, labour intensive with odd working hours. Narayanappa had to work night shifts in a printing press. He said, "Morning job, no one employs us as I am old." From his thatched house on Bengaluru's western periphery, he walks to the bus stand, changes two buses, travels five miles and reports

² Informality of work often attracts differing definitions. Most attributed elements of informal work in India are – jobs outside the legal system or purview of taxing, spending and regulating (Rains and Wibbels, 2020). These jobs lack security of tenure, differing work timings and low and irregular wages.

³ INR stands for Indian Rupee. The conversion between INR and USD is taken as 83 INR = 1 USD.

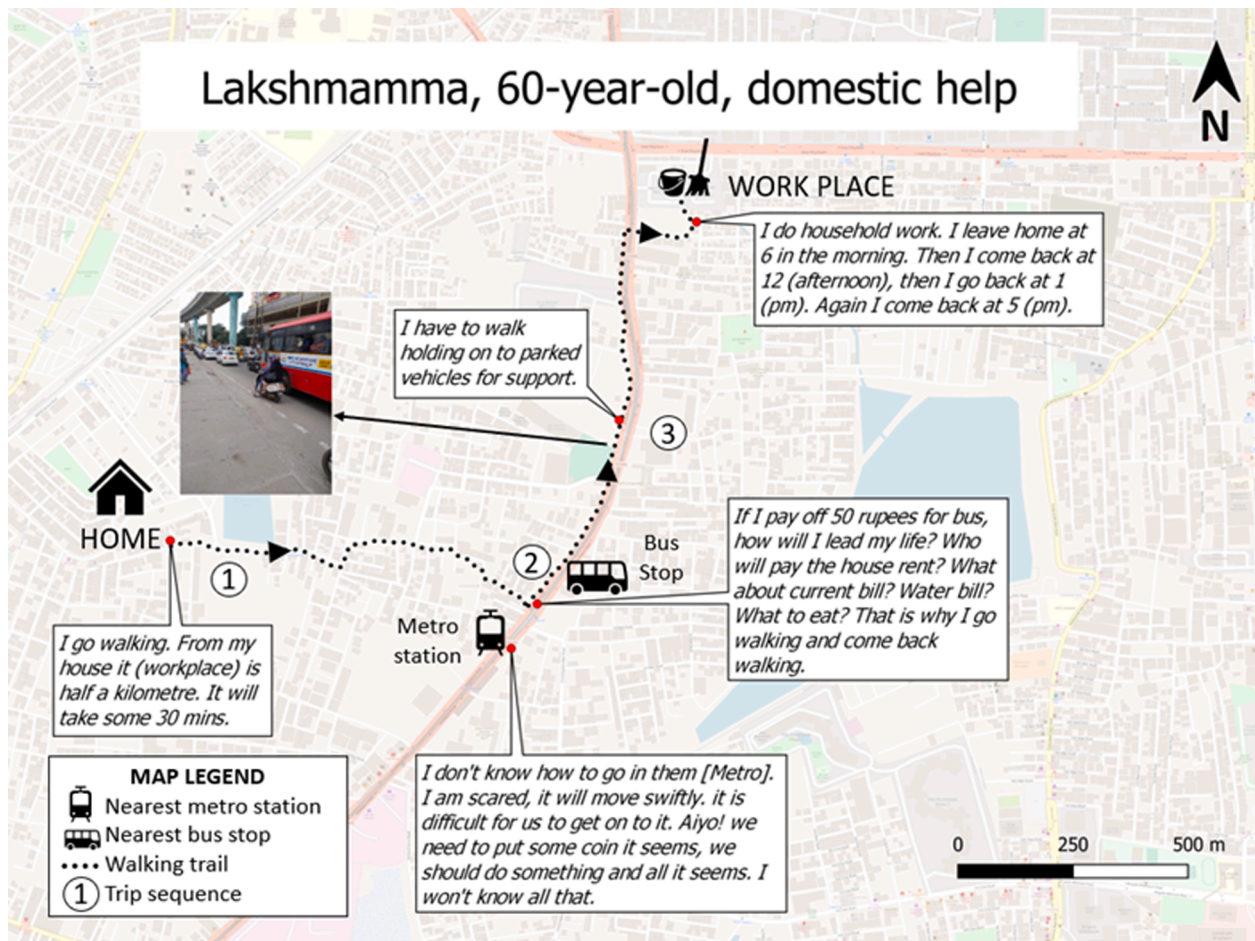


Fig. 2. Travel map of a female older adult commuting to the workplace Source: Author's representation.

to work at 9 pm. He works through the night and finishes packing newspaper bundles by 3:30 am. However, he must sleep for a few hours on the factory floor as the public buses resume service only at 6 am.

These micro-adjustments, which include waiting, walking the first-and-last mile and changing multiple buses, become harder with increasing physical ailments. Despite its high fares, many older men working as security guards and older women as domestic help depended on public buses. Chandramma, who changes three buses to work, narrated, 'I used to get around INR 6000 (approx. US \$ 73). In that almost INR1000 (approx. US \$ 13) would go for bus charge, the rest is for me' A sense of helplessness engulfed them when older informal workers discussed bus fares, which remained unaffordable despite age-based concessions⁴ by the State. Furthermore, unorganised labour's irregular and odd timings are incongruent with the *ad hoc* schedules of Bengaluru's public buses. Older workers ran out of transport options as first and last-mile connectivity is sparse and unaffordable. Many said they either squeezed into a crowded bus, shared an auto-rickshaw or walked a few miles to save money. The long hours of waiting and walking further tested their physical abilities. Though commuting to work was expensive and physically unbearable, they could not afford to 'retire.'

Older adults from middle- and higher-income groups also worked beyond their retirement age. After retirement from their formal, primary jobs, they re-entered the workforce with 'bridge' jobs that were part-

time, with reduced hours, effort and pay (Alcover et al., 2014; Shultz, 2003). These jobs were of two types, first, as consultants in real estate firms, construction companies, financial, banking and IT services: second, as self-employment in the form of retail stores and services such as tuition or beauty parlours. Unlike the forced labour of informal workers, participants from middle-income families expressed more agency and pride in their work which extended beyond economic necessity. They associated work with self-esteem and self-concept.

For instance, 78-year-old Stella John proudly narrates her 36 years of experience as a beautician and how she drives a car to the parlour and could do all beauty treatments, including pedicures, on her own. Though Stella did not experience any issues with driving, the skill became more challenging for older workers. Declining eyesight, poor hand-eye coordination, and gradual decline in confidence from crash-related events further harmed their confidence to drive. Bengaluru's dense traffic, narrow roads and uphill elevations created fear and panic among many older drivers. For instance, 62-year-old Savitri, who worked as an architect for 30 years, has driven a small car; she explains how she navigates specific barriers by avoiding certain geographies of the city:

I don't like to go in narrow roads. Even if it is roundabout, I don't mind. I take wide roads. I don't even mind signals. But I want wide and big roads with less traffic. In two-way traffic, there won't be any divider *na* for traffic. So, it will not be comfortable. Main roads will be neat, no potholes. I don't like driving so much. Especially these ups. I get little bit nervous to drive in such areas. If there is a lot of traffic and I stop in an up. I will hesitate, so I avoid it. I am scared and tensed; what if I let go of the brake? Almost I take only roads which

⁴ Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTCL), public bus system of Bengaluru offers 30 percent concession on bus fares and monthly passes for passengers who are 'senior citizens', essentially 60 years and above.

are level. I avoid roads with ups. (Savitri, 62-years-old, female, architect)

Though scooters and cars, on a few occasions, were affordable for middle-income families, drivability was an issue. For instance, despite having enthusiasm for more active forms of transport, such as cycling, older commuters described ageism and infrastructural challenges as fatal. Narendran, who rode a bicycle to work in a footwear showroom, was ridiculed in his colony for cycling like a 'young guy'; on one occasion, he narrowly escaped a life-threatening crash. Circumventing age norms, class and physical abilities to travel to bridge jobs was an ever-evolving challenge.

5.2. Gender norms: contested transport geographies

Gender norms around driving emerged as a vital differential, which was experienced more strongly in later age mobilities to work. Older women ventured out to work amidst patriarchal constructs or 'restrictive concerns' within traditional Indian families. Since they lacked opportunities to learn to drive motor vehicles, they depended on non-driving mobilities such as being pillion riders, public transport or shared mobilities (taxis). Madhura, a 62-year-old insurance agent, resides by herself. Her work involves commuting to a potential client's place to sell insurance. Due to her family's concern for her safety, they had insisted that she should not drive. Further, adverse experiences of 'pickpocketing' in public buses compelled her to try private cabs. However, smartphone-based technology-driven Apps to hail private cabs could also produce exclusionary experiences for older women. Recalling an 'embarrassing' episode, Madura, who was booking a cab on her phone from JP Nagar to her house in Ashok Nagar, said,

"I selected Ashok Nagar on the App. There is another Ashok Nagar, it seems, in Shivaji Nagar or somewhere. This is *Ola* language. I don't know that." (Madhura, a 62-year-old female, insurance agent)

Madhura was verbally abused by the driver and co-passengers and was dropped in an unfamiliar location. It took multiple attempts to rebuild her 'confidence' to use the booking App again. Madhura's case, is similar to many other older women, highlights the narrowing pool of modes they could opt to commute to the workplace. Adding to this deficit is the lack of institutional arrangements to reach workspaces. In a few cases, women's informal transport arrangements forged collectives, providing an alternative space for conviviality. Shared informal arrangements became a needed space for socialising for women, almost a support group. Manjula, a bank employee, explained her experience when she, along with her colleagues, negotiated with a maxi-cab (a private van) since they could not afford to use auto-rickshaws every day,

"That (van) was our life. Maximum [stresses] we have enjoyed. We wouldn't care if we didn't go to the office, but we wanted to go in that van. We lamented taking leaves as we couldn't go in the van. And could possibly miss out on so many issues and topics of talk [laughs]. Our meals were eaten there; we would comb our hair there, we would wear our jewellery there, so complete. We would share our family's happiness there; everything used to be in that." (Manjula Jayaram, 60-year-old, female, bank employee).

Though shared mobilities are often favoured due to affordability, older adults at times tend to reject these modes of mobilities due to safety concerns. It is crucial to acknowledge the significance of the composition of co-passengers and their level of trustworthiness (Anna-varapu, 2022). The fear experienced during travel extends beyond the confines of the enclosed vehicle cabin and onto the roads, where individuals assume the role of pedestrians at various stages of their travel. During the interviews, women from all economic strata, commuting to work or for leisure, frequently discussed chain-snatching (robbery) on the streets, particularly the theft of *Mangalsutra* (marital gold jewellery), as a significant barrier to walking in the neighbourhood. For older

women, the strict social norms surrounding wearing *Mangalsutra* and the inevitable nature of these walking trips combine to create vulnerable realities around walking.

Once, I was coming from Kanakapura (post-work). I got down from the bus and was walking towards my house. There were so many people around. In front of me only one person came in a bike and snatched a person's chain and went away. Seeing that only I got very scared. (Kavita, 62-year-old, female)

Because Bangalore roads of late have become infested with, you know, either with some burglary or some type of chain snatching or some type of offence on the aged people because we are vulnerable, we can't run so. (Rajashekar, 58-year-old, male)

I will be wearing one gold chain, so I will cover that and go. While we go out, we wear Churidar or Saree na, so I will use that to cover these jewels to conceal them. (Lata Subbaiah, 74-year-old, female)

Their anecdotal narratives indicate a deeper fear, sometimes emanating from victimhood but more often from witnessing robbery as a bystander. Often the internal and external negotiations were individual-centric - from avoiding certain crosswalks, early morning or late evening walks, planning routine work-related responsibilities within the daylight, and always ensuring they step out with someone to accompany them. Such negotiations created additional pressures, including that of time and the accompanying compromise on the first-and-last-mile journeys. The trauma of previous incidents, fear of losing one's valuable jewellery, possible injury, or even death due to such incidents restricted their walking routes. These experiences broaden the discussion of safety in workspaces beyond the office cab or a factory to the streets and buses in which they make these anxious journeys to work.

On the other hand, men narrated their fondness for their scooters, which they had used for many years instead of public transport. Many proudly admitted that it had been decades since they had stepped into a bus or rented an auto rickshaw. However, they referred to frequent confrontations with younger men due to variations in driving speeds. David lamented the disrespect meted out by younger and faster drivers on roads during such occasional rides. He says, 'These youngsters are only the problem makers.' The confrontations would sometimes challenge older drivers, as how Kantaraj recounts,

"He (youngster) replied 'old people like you should not even be riding a bike, go by bus it would be better'. I was shocked by his reply and did not say anything at all." (Kantaraj, 61-year-old, male)

5.3. Place: constricted labour geographies

Commuting and accessing transport to work from certain spaces within the city were much more difficult than others; often, these were low-income settlements within the city's core or geographical peripheries. Participants from different income groups coped differently with this challenge. Many middle-income older men with consulting jobs or private businesses were compelled to drive longer distances in their private vehicles, with such obstacles presenting consistent risks. Older persons described shifting their residence closer to workplaces to minimise the driving distance and the associated risks. For example, Dinesh Gupta, a 71-year-old businessperson, had set up a wristwatch showroom in Southern Bengaluru a decade ago. He drove his van ten miles daily between his residence and workplace. In a hushed voice, he explained that 'eyesight issues' forced him to be more 'cautious.' Hence, he shifted to a rented place on the periphery within walking distance of his workplace. Similarly, a 66-year-old Nancy Pramod shifted towards the eastern periphery to teach English in a Bible college. Financial stability cushioned the driving cessation in later age by providing alternative options to either hire drivers or shift their residence closer to their place of work. Shifting houses closer to the workplace or to the periphery was not a plausible option for all older adults, especially long-time residents on their property.

Lakshamma (see Fig. 2) wants to earn and lead an independent life and not depend on her two daughters residing on the same street. Five years back, she quit a better-paying domestic help job in a farther locality and opted to work for lower wages within the neighbourhood as she could not afford the bus fare. Despite the availability of metro and public bus routes, she neither knew how to access the metro nor could afford the bus. She now walks to the workplace, limping and leaning on parked vehicles for support. Finding jobs within the neighbourhood was not an option for all older workers.

Chandamma, a 78-year-old, unmarried woman living independently, commutes close to 13 miles changing two buses to cook in a *Brahmin*⁵ household. A few years ago, she shifted to the city's eastern periphery as a beneficiary of the State's social housing program. She could not find enough Brahmin families in her new neighbourhood. Given the rigidity around food⁶ in the caste system, Chandamma, to work as a cook, needed to find a family of the same sub-caste, i.e., *Baraganadu Smarthas*, to which she belonged. Compelled to undertake longer bus journeys, she describes in a mellow voice her experiences of travelling in two buses as follows:

They (bus drivers and conductors) tell me 'hoge' 'baare' (go and come in the singular, disrespectfully). Their rudeness is indescribable. While getting up also, [imitating the conductor's stern voice] 'Get down fast, how long will you take?' 'Get in soon, how much time will you need?'. They [imitating their mockery] say, 'We have kept this seat reserved for you only from a long time'. (Chandamma, 78-years-old, female, works as a domestic cook)

Subsidised public buses provide a relatively affordable option, but irregular schedules and inhospitable personnel behaviour remain significant barriers for older adults. Given the shrinking pool of affordable transport options, older adults were compelled to settle for lower-paying jobs within the neighbourhood. The economic precarity of informal labour further constricted their will to age independently. Despite such transport-related barriers, older workers in the informal sector expressed strong motivation to work and remain independent at a later age.

In this context of low-resourced ageing, community-level assistance enabled low-income older adults to commute to work. Poorer participants had resided in unrecognised slums (un-notified by the government) within the city or in *peri*-urban spaces for many decades. These spaces hosted closely-knit social groups. Extended families living on the same street, mostly grandchildren and acquaintances within these communities, formed informal support systems that arranged *ad hoc* transport. For instance, Subbamma, a 70-year-old, has lived for the last 45 years in an unrecognised slum within the city's core. She works as a cleaner in a factory a few streets away for a salary of INR 2000 (approx. 26 US \$) per month, which she spends on buying medicines, betel leaves, areca nuts and tea. Subbamma must cross a busy main road and walk a few meters to get to the factory. Crossing the road is a significant mobility activity for Subbamma and is often helped by an acquaintance within the community. However, these arrangements were impromptu, limited to the neighbourhood and hence unreliable. With age, many participants expressed an increasing pressure to opt for jobs within their neighbourhood requiring minimal commute (see Fig. 2). Overall, we observe a shrinking in labour geographies to access bridge jobs in later ages.

⁵ Brahmin is a group of sub-castes which are placed in the highest position of the social hierarchy of the Hindu caste system.

⁶ Most privileged castes have rigid and strict practices around preparation of food and dining. E.g., only a cook belonging to a Brahmin caste can enter and cook in the kitchen of a Brahmin household.

6. Discussion

The present study aimed to understand the role of urban transport in the journeys of older adults to work.

6.1. The implications for the political economy of ageing

Our results reinvigorate the need to take a 'systemic view' (Estes, 2000) of the political economy of ageing to comprehend the shifting values, institutions and policies regarding later age work and life. With this paper, we argue for a critical understanding of what it means to 'retire' in a largely informal economy. At the familial level, our findings present a nuanced view of the conventional notion of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson and Roberts, 1991; Hendricks and Yoon, 2006). While the social solidarity remained intact between generations, children in the informal sector struggled to provide financial and logistical (transport) support for their parents in later ages. Knodel's (2014) study on Thailand and Shyama and de Silva's (2022) on Sri Lanka note a sharp decline in the provision of material assistance from families to older persons. Our findings align with previous research in Indian context that has shown a decrease in the prevalence of extended family support systems (Bloom et al., 2010; Golandaj et al., 2013; Goli et al., 2019). Consequently, a growing number of older individuals are compelled to reverse or delay their retirement decisions and re-join the workforce through bridge jobs.

From a policy perspective, neo-liberal policies have produced a form of 'ageing enterprise' to position later age needs as products for individuals, often left to the markets (Estes, 2014). When Lakshamma says, "If we work, we have food or else nothing," it points to this individualisation of financial precarity, physical mobilities and the passive role of the state. Bridge jobs emerge as a meeting point of survival option for older adults and an opportunity for cheap labour for the market. India has one of the highest labour workforce participation, among which 2/3rd is self-employed (Reddy and Goli, 2023) understandably the commuting costs to these jobs are also individualised. As Reddy and Goli (2023) highlight, bridge employment, mostly self-employment in later age, is a 'last resort' option with no employer benefits.

Lastly, in line with what Walker (1981) and Estes (2000) posit, our study participants' retirement conditions were determined not solely by age but by a complex social construction of gender, class, and spatiality. The retirement trajectories of women workers provide cautionary evidence of this complex assemblage of the feminisation of ageing, the greater dependence on state-provided pensions and the patriarchal systems forcing them to depend on informal work but also fewer options to access labour (Estes, 2000; Reddy and Goli, 2023). By highlighting the individualisation of risks (Vickerstaff and Cox, 2005) related to retirement, work and transport arrangements, we bring back focus on the larger macro pressures to remain in the workforce. This study is a small step to situate access to bridge work in the larger systemic view of the political economy of ageing. Given that the average age is increasing in India and other developing countries, there is an urgent need to reconstitute the labour markets, transport infrastructures and social security to enable access to these labour geographies.

6.2. (In)evitability of bridge work in India and the Global South

Our results highlight the inevitability of bridge jobs in later age (see Fig. 1), an increasing phenomenon in India and the Global South. As the United Nations (2023, p. 56) report acknowledges, many older adults in developing regions have no option to retire. Studies on informal economies in Africa and Latin America suggest that the social assistance provided for older adults is 'wide but not deep' enough to retire (Holland and Schneider, 2017; United Nations, 2023). While in developing countries, public transfers (pension and healthcare) cover nearly 2/3rd of consumption, in India, nearly 95 percent of later-age expenses are financed by personal savings or asset-based reallocation of funds (United

Nations, 2023). Similar to our results, research in other contexts of Global South - Nigeria (Beedie, 2014), Brazil (Neumann and Albert, 2018), Turkey (Özen, 2020) and Sri Lanka (Shyama and de Silva, 2022) points to this financial crunch forcing older adults to return to work to supplement their inadequate pensions. In the Indian context, our results highlight the rising importance of 'self-employment' and work in the informal sector among older adults, which are 'not a matter of choice' (Reddy and Goli, 2023). Further, our paper also brings to light that the choice to work at later ages differs across classes. E.g., Both Stella John and Lakshamma are in bridge jobs, but Stella John has a choice to work as a beautician, however, for Lakshamma, it is a matter of sustenance. We note that research and policies concerning age-friendly workplaces (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2015) often have myopically focused workplaces but rarely transport access to these labour geographies. Our study highlights the channels of discrimination can begin on the streets and inside the buses with differential access to labour geographies well before entering the 'factory gates' (Dutta, 2016). If these linkages between the political economy of ageing and labour geographies (Harper and Laws, 1995) remain ignored, as our study suggests, older adults in the Global South seeking bridge work can fall back into the poverty trap and precarity. Our study is an initial foray towards understanding how bridge jobs challenge our chronological understanding of retirement. Given that bridge jobs are a reality, we see the potential for further research to focus on the availability, accessibility and working conditions of bridge jobs.

6.3. Transport-related exclusion from labour geographies

Geographers and gerontologists have increasingly researched transport-related exclusion (Lucas, 2012; Nordbakke and Schwanen, 2014; Schwanen et al., 2012b). However, labour geographies have not received the focus 'care landscapes' and 'transport geographies' have received (Andrews et al., 2007; Curl and Musselwhite, 2018; Skinner et al., 2015). This research attempts to fill this literature gap using a transport lens to explain the barriers in later-age labour geographies. Working-class older adults (see Fig. 2) experience discrimination with ageism affecting employability; lack of age-inclusive transport affecting mobilities, thus narrowing their economic landscape and isolating them socially. Variables of ageing, the economic precarity of bridge employments and transport inequalities produce a vicious spiral of natural and artificial limits. While activity theories equate participation in activities to life satisfaction and productivity, our study presents a geographical context of work participation, further stifled by precarious transport infrastructure in the Global South (Vasconcellos, 2014). Bengaluru's unaffordable public (metro and bus) and paratransit (taxi and auto-rickshaw) options eliminated motorised transport for poorer older adults. We highlight the non-age-friendly public transport environments such as high-floor buses, lack of reserved seats, and inhospitable behaviour of bus personnel; Metro rail and private cab's techno-centric ecosystem marginalise older adults from low-income communities and place artificial limits on older workers, particularly those employed in bridge jobs. Previous research in Indian cities supports our empirical evidence on 'cost-prohibitive' and inaccessible transport infrastructure for older adults with evidence from Delhi, Chennai (Adlakha et al., 2020) and Kochi (Munshi et al., 2018). In addition to the physiological changes associated with ageing (Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010), the transport system in Bengaluru and urban India is insufficient and inhospitable (Adlakha et al., 2020; Gopakumar, 2020; Munshi et al., 2018), thereby shrinking the later age geographies, including access to bridge work.

6.4. Age-friendly transport measures for later-age work

Our study is an initial foray into understanding the subjective experiences from the interaction of age with caste, class, gender and geography while commuting for bridge work in Indian cities. Nevertheless,

the findings of our study offer insights for policymakers who are involved in the development of sustainable and age-friendly urban environments, particularly in regions such as Africa, Latin America, and Asia. These regions face the dual challenges of growing urbanisation and an ageing population. Our results show that older men and women actively participate in labour markets and unpaid caregiving, contrary to the 'dependency' theory (Berkman et al., 2012). A primary tenet of an age-friendly city is to enable participation in labour markets (WHO, 2007). However, our results suggest that the transport policies of Bengaluru, similar to other Indian cities, have remained less responsive to the mobility needs of older workers and more so from marginalised settings. As Kębłowski (2020) notes, urban governments across developed and developing countries increasingly consider fare-free public transport as an economical, socially just and politically transformative move. Similar to the fare-free transport schemes (FFPT) for older adults in Shanghai, Canberra, Slovakia and United Kingdom's old age pensioner concessions (Kębłowski, 2020), Indian cities such as Bengaluru can introduce fare-free public transport for older adults in public buses and metro rails. Though FFPT schemes for women in the Indian context are expanding (Delhi, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka), there seems to be limited empirical evidence on the experiences of older women. Equitable access of older adults to economic and social activities could mitigate the longstanding threat of poverty and social isolation in later ages. Our qualitative evidence argues the need for greater flexibility and effort from urban transport planners to accommodate older adults' access to workspaces. In line with Moody (2001), we argue the need to understand the subjective experiences of work and provision better access to ensure generational equity. We urge the age-friendly cities framework must consider the life-work continuum as seriously as it focuses on the care and health landscapes.

7. Conclusion

Notwithstanding a few methodological challenges, this study plugs a critical knowledge gap connecting later-age work and transport inequalities in the context of the urban Global South. Bengaluru's case embodies the complex assemblages of how older adults must navigate labour geographies despite transport resource deficits. Everyday commuting and participating in the workforce through such trips are significant to their survival. However, transport opportunities for low-income older workers, women and those in low-income settlements rapidly diminished. The evidence draws attention from urban planners, geographers and gerontologists to capture these subjective needs and experiences to intervene and address transport inequalities for marginalised groups. In the absence of accessible transport, missed trips to bridge workspaces could significantly threaten the survival of older adults in the low-income urban settlements of the Global South.

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

Prajwal Nagesh: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Resources, Data curation, Visualization, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Ajay Bailey:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Resources, Data curation, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition,

Writing – review & editing. **Sobin George:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Funding acquisition, Writing – review & editing. **Lekha Subaiya:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2023.103878>.

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