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Young Lives 
An International Study of Childhood Poverty

The ethics of social research with children and families in Young Lives, a longitudinal study in Ethiopia, Andhra Pradesh (India), Peru and Vietnam

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Background to Young Lives

- Longitudinal study of childhood poverty - Ethiopia, Andhra Pradesh, India, Peru and Vietnam
- 12,000 children 2002-2017 (MDG context)
- Household survey every 3 years
- Qualitative research (2007, 2008, 2010/11, 2014) with 'nested' sample
- Improve the understanding of causes and consequences of childhood poverty
- Examine how policies affect children

Sample and methods

- Two cohorts of children- 2000 who were born in 2001-02, 1000 born in 1994-5
- Survey: household, child and community questionnaires
- Qualitative research - multi-method approach, including interviews, group activities, child-led tours, group discussions, with children, caregivers and other community members
- 3 themes – dynamics of child poverty, children's experiences, and learning, work and transitions
- Additional studies

Ethics

- ‘moral principles guiding research, from its inception *through to completion and publication of results and beyond*’ (ESRC Research Ethics Framework 2005) (cf. medical model)
- Developing the ethics guidelines for Qual 1, refinement following fieldwork - eg consent for archiving Survey Rounds 1, 2, 3
- Revisiting ethics questions needs to be continuous
- Across qualitative, survey and policy teams, i.e. across countries and disciplines
- Dilemmas documented - shared enquiry

Informed consent

- Community consent, parents' and children's consent
- Consent audio-recorded
- Raised expectations (Ethiopia and Peru)
- Fear of abduction (eg Peru – linked to local myths that have a long history)
- Some confusion with NGOs – people ask for, and expect, help
- Previous experiences of 'projects' matter

Positive accounts

- Parents' concerns can be allayed with careful explanations
- Locally relevant: in India:
'when cooking rice, you will take some grains and test whether it's cooked or not, you will not check the whole rice. In the same way, we select some children...'

Explaining to children

- Asking children to recount what they remember of the last visit from YL (India)
- ‘Sirs visited, they have spoken to us, recorded the discussion... asked me to read and speak’
- Eg Ethiopia refusal of one child despite parents’ willingness

Other questions

- Anonymity – people, locations
- Use of images
- Child protection matters – training, sensitivity to family matters
- Continuity of fieldwork staff
- Building and maintaining trust
- What happens to the information?

Effects on children and families

- Wish to maintain contact:
- ‘All the best, don’t leave us behind, come visit us always’
- Questions encourage reflection
- Need to follow this over time
- Some will welcome continued involvement, others may resent it

Giving something back?

- Rewards, compensation, incentives?
- Reporting back preliminary findings – how to do this to different audiences?
- Returning relevant information from YL research to communities to maintain trust and respect
- But realistic awareness about likelihood of change.

Discussion

- Understanding context – dynamic
- Imposition of ‘Western’ standards on non-western situations?
- 3-way learning process - fieldworkers, country teams, Oxford – ethics committees?

THANK YOU!

For further information, please see:

www.younglives.org.uk