

Influencing the design and methodology of other studies

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- Young Lives' robust and innovative methodology has informed the design of a significant number of important studies worldwide.
- Studies influenced include UNICEF's Global Longitudinal Research Initiative (GLORI), the Global Early Adolescence Study (GEAS), and the Department for International Development's (DFID)'s Research into Improving Systems of Education (RISE) programme.
- Young Lives has also had significant impact on research ethics considerations, including using informed consent with children in low-income countries, in these and other studies. We have acted as an exemplar for other studies to follow, and our methods have been used widely in the teaching of ethics.

Setting the scene

The strength and quality of the Young Lives study lies not just in its enormously rich collection of data but in its innovative methodology. As part of its approach to impact, Young Lives' Theory of Change (2015) states as its intention 'that the methodological and partnership story of Young Lives is articulated and disseminated in ways and through networks that improve the design, cost-effectiveness and impact of future cohort studies in low- and middle-income countries'. This has been realised in a wide range of important studies worldwide whose design has been informed by Young Lives, providing clear evidence of the quality and robustness of our methods. Young Lives has built up considerable expertise in relation to research ethics in studies of children in low-income countries, and other important studies have looked to us for guidance in this area when drawing up their own research programmes.

Young Lives influence on other studies

Young Lives is a key partner in **UNICEF's Global Longitudinal Research Initiative (GLORI)**, an innovative resource which aims to identify how cohort studies can contribute to policy and research, identify gaps in knowledge and share lessons on the

practice of longitudinal studies. Young Lives was involved in the initial DFID-funded GLORI planning meeting in late 2014 which created an outcome document and advocacy toolkit, and hosted a second meeting in 2015 which we co-funded with UNICEF, in order to maintain momentum for the Network at a time of discussions around the Sustainable Development Goals. Through GLORI, Young Lives methods and best practice are having a direct influence on the design of the next generation of longitudinal cohort studies.

Young Lives has influenced the design of the **Global Early Adolescent Study (GEAS)**, a major study of 10-14 year olds in 15 countries that aims to understand the factors in early adolescence that predispose young people to subsequent sexual health risks and conversely promote healthy sexuality, so as to provide the information needed to promote sexual and reproductive well-being. It is a partnership between the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, and research institutions in 15 countries around the world. Young Lives provided the GEAS team with information about our methodology, approach, survey design, questionnaires, some of which has been integrated into the GEAS design and survey. We have had an important influence on research ethics considerations, as revealed in the quote below.

“ The Young Lives programme has been both a guiding light and inspiration for the Global Early Adolescent Study. We have drawn on the expertise and lessons learnt from YL frequently and continue to do so. For example, we have patterned our ethical guidelines consistent with those of YL. We have drawn on the context evaluation work that has been so important to young lives and have consulted with both the YL economists and social scientists as we have planned our measures. We have learned immeasurably about approaches to longitudinal research with children and young adolescents; and we have looked for every opportunity to partner and collaborate for the YL team fully understands that we are all beneficiaries of strong collaborations. ”

Professor Robert Wm. Blum, Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health, Director, Johns Hopkins Urban Health Institute, Johns Hopkins University

Young Lives has also had a significant influence on **DFID’s Research into Improving Systems of Education (RISE)** programme, reflecting Young Lives’ considerable expertise in research on school effectiveness. Young Lives has collaborated closely over how learning outcomes are measured in RISE; our methods have been integrated into the programme, and many of the study design elements in RISE build on Young Lives’ design. This collaborative approach means that Young Lives has arguably formed the foundation for RISE, which would not otherwise have existed in its current form. It is also likely to have saved time and effort in terms of study design. Young Lives’ ‘organic model’ of collaboration and engagement – designing its schools research with the people who are actually going to use the data – has influenced RISE too; as a result of our advice, RISE plans to set up in-country advisory/technical boards to ensure that the data they collect is relevant and useful to local partners.

Young Lives had an impact on the **choice of study countries in RISE** (Vietnam, India and Ethiopia are all included). Young Lives was the first study to demonstrate that educational outcomes in Vietnam at primary level are particularly high; we are examining *why* they are doing so well – reaching or even exceeding learning levels of students in developed countries. These findings are likely to have had a major impact on the choice to include an in-depth project on Vietnam, which will investigate further how the country has ‘got it right’ on learning.

In Latin America, Young Lives has contributed to the design of an **IADB/IDRC funded project on Youth and the Labour Market**. This cross-country study is taking place in eight Latin American countries to investigate the transition to the labour market in young people aged 15-24. A number of Young Lives survey modules have been included, and Young Lives also contributed to the design of their survey questionnaire. A comparative study is being carried out using the data collected for the eight study countries; additionally Young Lives have been asked to contribute a chapter on Peru based on Young Lives data (Peru is not one of the eight countries).

“ Our project seeks to better understand the opportunities and barriers that young people in Latin America face for their social and economic integration. We expect to measure youth aspirations and expectations, cognitive and non-cognitive skills, material and emotional well-being, and risky behaviour

and social attitudes, as well as how these correlate with educational and labor market outcomes. Young Lives study methods and data greatly helped us guide the development of our own survey. Young Lives’ rich questionnaire covers many aspects of the lives of adolescents and young adults that are relevant for our study. We have benefited from its tools and measures in building a more effective instrument that will hopefully help inform policy towards improving youth opportunities in our region. ”

Andrea Repetto, Espacio Publico

Rafael Novella, Inter-American Development Bank (IADB)

Lessons from the design of Young Lives have been used in a **cohort study run by the Family Studies Group at Universidad de la Republica in Uruguay** in collaboration with other public bodies. The study, *Encuesta de Nutrición, Desarrollo Infantil y Salud* (Nutrition, Infant Development and Health Survey – ENDIS) began in 2013. In August 2015, soon after the data from the first ENDIS wave was available, and recognising that it needed to build capacity in the running of this type of study, the Family Studies Group organised a workshop to learn from international experiences on cohort studies, with a particular focus on children and teenagers. Santiago Cueto from Young Lives Peru was a key participant. The lessons from the workshop were crucial for planning the second wave of ENDIS, and the Young Lives Peru experience was acknowledged as being particularly useful for the design.

“ The set of outcomes assessed in the Young Lives study are very similar to the ones in ENDIS and we were able to learn on the difficulties involved in maintaining the different questions through time and how to combine questions that are relevant in all childhood stages, with those that are age specific and pose comparability problems, although they are relevant to capture each cohort. Other findings from the Young Lives research agenda, as the recent improvements in health and nutritional outcomes in older children, were very relevant to set the future ENDIS research agenda for the second and further waves. ”

Wanda Cabella, Coordinator, Population Programme, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de la República, Uruguay

In Vietnam, Young Lives interacted closely with **Plan International before the start of their three-year longitudinal study of nearly 300 Vietnamese children** aged 3-5 (2015-18). This is an intervention study, looking at improving teaching methodology for this age group, and raising awareness among parents. Plan International took advice from Young Lives on the methodology for the study, especially in relation to the need for control groups and the importance of not replacing children who drop out from the sample. The Young Lives Vietnam data manager has been asked to provide ongoing advice and support.

Also in Vietnam, and following the launch of the primary school survey findings, the **World Bank funded project School Education Quality Assurance Program (SEQAP)** run by Vietnam’s Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) approached Young Lives staff for advice on the application of EGRA (Early Grade Reading Assessments). EGRA is a key international test for measuring school-based learning and an important tool for assessing education quality and effectiveness. As a result of the advice EGRA tests were subsequently used by MOET in four provinces in educational surveys to measure the impact of SEQAP interventions.

The British Academy (BA) and Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) have launched a pilot longitudinal cohort study in Tanzania, Pakistan and Bangladesh which makes substantial use of Young Lives methods and includes a number of Young Lives team members in the collaboration. The study has an intervention component and aims to significantly increase understanding of child development and what can be done at different developmental stages to mitigate adverse environmental factors. Young Lives has provided expertise for the longitudinal cohort aspect, specifically on data collection in low- and middle-income settings. The BA/IFS study includes measures of multiple dimensions of child development at various stages, and has drawn on Young Lives experience in piloting and administering child development measures (including cognitive, executive functioning, and psycho-social).

Other studies have approached Young Lives for one-off advice and support on research methods and survey and instrument design. For example, in 2013 we were approached by the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation who sought our assistance in the design of a new study in the Education and Social Progress project on skills dynamics.

Research Ethics

Young Lives has conducted research with young people in four countries for 15 years, and as a result has developed a deep and detailed understanding of the numerous ethics questions that are raised through research with children and families in low-income settings, and research that requires sustaining of relationships over time. Young Lives features as a case study on the ESRC website which describes how the study implements full informed consent with all those taking part in its research, no matter what age they are or what their circumstances. Young Lives also contributed a case study on compensation and payment to research participants to [Ethical Research Involving Children](#) (Graham, A., et al (2013). Florence: UNICEF Office of Research).

As noted above, GEAS has drawn heavily on Young Lives expertise in research ethics; consultation is ongoing about drawing up ethical guidelines for GEAS in relation to child protection issues. Under the Building Evidence in Education (BE²) initiative, in which DFID is a partner and which also involves UNICEF and the World Bank, Young Lives researchers co-authored a guide to qualitative research in education in low- and middle-income countries focusing on research ethics, fieldwork planning, and data analysis. This will be published June 2018 [Building Evidence in Education (BE²) (2018). Guidance Note on Qualitative Research in Education: Considerations for use in middle and low income countries. HEART, Oxford, UK].

Young Lives also made a contribution to the **Nuffield Council on Bioethics** international symposium on children and clinical research held in 2016, which brought together delegates

involved in work in low- and middle-income countries. The aim of the event was to explore how recommendations of the Council's 2015 report *Children and clinical research: ethical issues*, published in May 2015, might apply in very different settings from the UK, and develop practical recommendations for research and governance to help facilitate and improve research with children worldwide, published (2016) as *Research with children: ethical processes and challenges around the world*.

“While the Nuffield Council is a UK-based organisation and tends to focus primarily on policy questions of concern to UK audiences, clinical research with children is often, of necessity, an international endeavour because of the relative rarity of many childhood conditions and the need for international collaboration to achieve sufficiently large cohorts. Moreover, a significant amount of research conducted among children in low income environments is funded through UK-based organisations. It was therefore important that the working group was alert to the very different ways in which children and families might experience research participation around the globe. Virginia Morrow's contribution, drawing on her extensive knowledge of the Young Lives project in Ethiopia, Peru, India and Vietnam, was an important part of the 'jigsaw' of contributions made from researchers working in Africa, South East Asia and Latin America; significantly, it also helped counterbalance other contributions based on interventional medical research, in emphasising the different ethical challenges experienced by those working on multinational longitudinal studies.”

Katherine Wright, Assistant Director, Nuffield Council on Bioethics

In May 2018, Young Lives was invited to participate in a research ethics workshop funded by Wellcome and the Medical Research Council and hosted by the Ethox Centre at Oxford University. This was the first of a series of international workshops for REACH – 'Resilience, empowerment, and advocacy in women's and children's health research', an international collaborative study in research ethics between bioethicists, social scientists and clinical researchers in the UK, Kenya, South Africa and Thailand aiming to address critical gaps in practical ethics guidance for responsible research with women, children and families in low-income countries, and inform ethical research with historically vulnerable populations of all kinds.

Young Lives researchers have also presented on research ethics at a wide range of other workshops and conferences. For example, in 2017 and 2018 presentations were given at the RGS-IBG conference, at the UCL Institute of Education and at Brunel University on the ethics of research reciprocity. These presentations asked participants to consider questions such as: Is it ethical to involve impoverished children in research about their aspirations with no intention of resourcing or supporting them? Do we raise children's expectations by simply asking them to imagine their future selves? This was followed up with a [blog on the Young Lives website](#) which also addressed these issues.