

# Young Lives Longitudinal Qualitative Research

A Guide for Researchers



# Young Lives Longitudinal Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers

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## About Young Lives

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty tracking 12,000 children's lives over 15 years in 4 developing countries – Ethiopia, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam. The pro-poor sample is drawn from 20 sites in each country, and includes two age cohorts (2,000 children who were born in 2001-02, and 1,000 children who were born in 1994-95 in each country). Three rounds of the household and child survey have been completed to date, in 2002 2006-07 and 2009, interspersed with a longitudinal qualitative survey in 2007, 2008 and 2010/11. Further rounds of the household survey are due in 2013 and 2016, with the fourth round of qualitative research in 2014.

Young Lives is funded from 2001 to 2017 by UK aid from the Department for International Development (DFID) and co-funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2010 to 2014. The Bernard van Leer Foundation funded a sub-study on early childhood transitions which was a major part of the first round of qualitative research in 2007.

The views expressed are those of the authors. They are not necessarily those of, or endorsed by, Young Lives, the University of Oxford, DFID, or other funders.

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# Guide to the Reader

This document is a reproduction of a fieldwork guide produced collaboratively by an international team of researchers taking part in the Young Lives study. Young Lives is a long-term study of childhood poverty in four countries: Ethiopia, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam. This document is the manual that guided the first of four planned rounds of data collection in 2007 as part of a longitudinal qualitative research design. The longitudinal qualitative study is tracking 50 children in each study country, using a case-study approach to document their changing life trajectories over time. This Guide gives a short description of our rationale and ways of working. Full details of how the research was implemented are contained in the Fieldwork Guide for each data collection round.

We share these documents for other researchers carrying out social research with children and young people in poverty to adapt, use and develop in their own work. We have tried to maintain as much of the original document as possible; this means that the language is directed towards field researchers working as part of Young Lives. Internally, we refer to the different rounds of data collection as 'Qual-1', 'Qual-2', and 'Qual-3', and these are the terms used in this document. It should be read in conjunction with the *Young Lives Longitudinal Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers* (Young Lives Technical Note 27) which provides background and an overview of the longitudinal qualitative research to date.

This document was drafted in early 2007 before we embarked upon the first round of our research. We have checked and updated it ready for publication in this format in early 2013. We would be very interested to hear from anyone who adapts or uses any of the ideas contained within this Guide for their own work.

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## Related documents

Young Lives (2013a) *Young Lives Longitudinal Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers*, Technical Note 26, Oxford: Young Lives.

Young Lives (2013b) *Young Lives Qualitative Fieldwork Guide: Round One (2007)*, Technical Note 27, Oxford: Young Lives.

Young Lives (2013c) *Young Lives Qualitative Fieldwork Guide: Round Two (2008)*, Technical Note 28, Oxford: Young Lives.

Young Lives (2013d) *Young Lives Qualitative Fieldwork Guide: Round Three (2010/11)*, Technical Note 29, Oxford: Young Lives.

## 1. Introduction

Young Lives is an innovative long-term international study which investigates the changing nature of childhood poverty in four countries: Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam. Its purpose is to improve the understanding of the causes, dynamics and consequences of childhood poverty and to examine how policies affect children's well-being. Young Lives places children and young people at the centre of the research process, in

recognition of the fact that children are social actors who can offer their own insights and understandings about their lives and societies. The experiences and perceptions of children are therefore viewed as a major resource to provide a better understanding of childhood poverty across differing contexts.

Young Lives uses both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, tracking children and their households over a 15-year period (2001–16). It gathers longitudinal data on two cohorts of children born in 1994/5 and 2000/1, involving 1,000 and 2,000 children respectively in each country. The primary research instrument is a panel survey which is conducted with children, households and communities every three years. The survey data are considered a public good and are freely available to external researchers, practitioners and other interested parties.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, qualitative longitudinal data are generated with a sub-sample of 200 children, across all four countries, providing a set of ‘nested case studies’ within the larger sample. This enables detailed exploration of changes and continuity in children’s life trajectories, and of the commonalities and differences in their experiences. It provides an in-depth understanding of children’s everyday experiences of school and work, and of their responsibilities and relationships.

By 2012, Young Lives had completed three survey rounds, in 2002, 2006 and 2009, with the full research sample, together with three rounds of qualitative data generated in the intervening years (2007, 2008 and 2010/11).

## 2. Background to Young Lives qualitative research

The original research consortium in charge of Young Lives conceived the study as a survey-based panel design with limited scope for qualitative enquiry. Five years into the study, Young Lives transferred to the University of Oxford. In January 2006, the Young Lives team in Oxford began to plan and develop a new, longitudinal qualitative component of the study which would be conducted in between survey rounds. The major strength of qualitative longitudinal research is the opportunity to study the role of poverty in shaping children’s biographies from within a life-course framework (Locke and Lloyd-Sherlock 2011).

The qualitative component is embedded within the wider design of the study and it complements other major data sources, such as the child, household and community surveys<sup>2</sup> and school-based components<sup>3</sup>, as well as discrete qualitative sub-studies on specific topics of interest (such as children’s experiences of social protection programmes). It places great importance on children’s (and caregivers’) detailed narrative accounts, reflecting on their childhoods (past, present and future); including their perspectives on what has contributed to shaping their situations and well-being, their aspirations and goals, and their expectations for future outcomes. Analysis of qualitative data complements, and is often

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1 Users registered with the UK Data Archive have free access to the Young Lives survey data:  
<http://www.esds.ac.uk/international/access/l33379.asp>

2 <http://www.younglives.org.uk/what-we-do/household-and-child-surveys>.

3 <http://www.younglives.org.uk/what-we-do/school-surveys>.

used in combination with, survey analysis; it focuses on the factors and processes explaining the diverging experiences and trajectories of different groups of Young Lives children.

The overarching question guiding Young Lives qualitative longitudinal research is:

- How does poverty interact with other factors at individual, household, community and inter-generational levels to shape children's life trajectories over time?

The first round of qualitative data collection in 2007 was structured around three areas of enquiry, namely:

- What are the key **transitions** in children's lives, how are they experienced, and what influences these experiences?
- How is children's **well-being** understood and evaluated by children, caregivers, and other stakeholders?
- How do policies, programmes, and **services** shape children's transition and well-being?

From 2010 the wider Young Lives study has clustered its research analysis and policy engagement around three core themes ('*Learning, work and transitions*'; '*Children's experiences of poverty*'; and '*Dynamics of childhood poverty*'), and there is considerable overlap with our baseline qualitative research foci.

## 3. Who participates in qualitative longitudinal research?

### 3.1. The research teams

Each country team has a dedicated Lead Qualitative Researcher (LQR), who coordinates a small team with one or two assistant researchers and a team of field workers. They work with other Young Lives staff in country, including a country director, a data manager, quantitative researchers and the policy and communications officers. Qualitative researchers in the study countries work closely with researchers at the University of Oxford to develop research protocols and training guidelines, discuss emerging themes and research priorities, and collaborate on analyses and the dissemination of findings. Each round of data generation is guided by an overarching set of research questions, with agreed core tools, to ensure consistency of approach. This ensures that the integrity of the longitudinal, panel, aspect of the study is maintained. However, country teams also have the flexibility to develop additional lines of enquiry, and use complementary methods and approaches relevant to their specific contexts.

### 3.2. The communities

The Young Lives survey is carried out in 20 sentinel sites in each country, which were purposively selected to ensure that poor areas were over-sampled. Children and households were then randomly selected from within these sites in each country.<sup>4</sup>

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4 For more information on the Young Lives sampling strategy, see *Young Lives Methods Guide: Sampling*, December 2011 (<http://www.younglives.org.uk/files/methods-guide/methods-guide-sampling>) and *Young Lives: A Case Study of Sample Design for Longitudinal Research*, Working Paper 10, by Ian Wilson and Sharon Huttly.

The qualitative research component is being carried out in between three and five sites in each country, chosen to capture variations in location (rural/urban), ethnicity (minority and majority groups), and social and economic circumstances.

### **3.3. The children and their caregivers**

Young Lives is a cohort study. The full sample includes 2,000 children from a younger cohort (born in 2000–01) and 1,000 children from an older cohort (born in 1994–95) in each country. The full sample of children is surveyed every few years (beginning at the age of 8, they are invited to answer the survey questions), along with their primary caregivers and representatives from their communities.

In 2007, children were purposively sampled from each of the qualitative study sites – an equal number of boys and girls, and an equal number of Younger and Older Cohort children. In total, 200 children (and their caregivers) were selected across the four countries to participate in the qualitative longitudinal component. A reserve of children of similar ages was also selected, as we expected that over the years some case-study children would not wish to continue to participate, or would not be available during field visits, or would move out of the community.

## **4. Development of methods**

In 2006, several literature reviews were conducted by the research team in Oxford to strengthen the qualitative research questions and to identify a shortlist of potential methods to be used in the first round of qualitative research. Topics covered by the reviews included: (a) child-focused methods; (b) children's time-use; (c) risk and resilience; (d) children's well-being; and (e) childhood transitions. The reviews found that much child-poverty research is dominated by survey approaches, and often relies on adults' views and reports. Furthermore, most research had been carried out in developed-country contexts, and therefore the methods selected would have to be carefully piloted to test their suitability for Young Lives study countries. A short-list of potential methods was developed according to the following criteria:

- thematic – to capture information relevant to the broad research themes and policy work exploring children's everyday lives in poverty;
- semi-structured – to ensure that core themes can be studied consistently through an agreed set of methods, to allow for inter-country comparability;
- applicable in diverse settings – chosen methods need to be implemented in very diverse settings across all four countries, making allowances for the involvement of field workers from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and with variable experience of researching with children;
- flexibility – to allow children to identify issues that are important to them, in ways that are sensitive to variation in age, literacy levels, cultures, and preferred methods of communicating;
- potential for longitudinal use – the qualitative component was set up from the beginning as a long-term study so that methods that could be repeated at different data-collection points to track changes (e.g. in aspirations; of time-use; in relationships, etc.) were included.



## 4.1. Pilot study

A selection of methods was piloted in 2006 in Peru by an Oxford-based researcher and two Peruvian researchers with children who were not part of the Young Lives sample (Johnston 2008a, 2008b). The aim was to test methods for use with children as an initial step in the development of a full research protocol. Most of the methods chosen have their roots in participatory work with adults and children (for example, we drew upon the work of the Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD) team at Bath University, and the work of Jon Hubbard at the Centre for Victims of Torture, Minneapolis). Instruments were adapted to reflect the particular characteristics of the research context and the age of the children.

Four inter-related themes were investigated: children's time-use, well-being, understandings of poverty and children's social worlds.<sup>5</sup> Methods were piloted with groups of children aged 11–12 years (n=39) and aged 8–9 years (n=13).<sup>6</sup> Two sites were chosen for the research: one poor urban area<sup>7</sup> involved 31 children, and an isolated poor rural area<sup>8</sup> included 21 children.

The pilot study enabled the Young Lives team to sift out methods which were unsuitable and to identify those that required further adaptation in order to be responsive to local competencies, literacy levels, cultural and social norms, as well as the age of the children. It also provided an opportunity to consider the characteristics of potential facilitators and other field workers, the logistical aspects of carrying out the research across diverse settings, and the various techniques for observing, recording, and reporting the data.

The results of the pilot study in Peru led to the refinement of the qualitative research questions and informed the development of a shared methods toolkit for the first round of Young Lives qualitative research ('Qual-1', August–December 2007 – see Young Lives Qualitative Fieldwork Guide: Round 1). In addition to the initial pilot study in Peru, each country team subsequently conducted a pilot study prior to main data collection.<sup>9</sup>

The Young Lives qualitative methods toolkit is updated for each successive round of data generation, to incorporate reflections and lessons learned by research teams, and to ensure that tools are relevant for evolving research questions. It is a collaborative process involving in-country teams and Oxford researchers, and it includes the piloting of proposed methods, combined with training of local field workers.

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5 The pilot report (Johnston 2008a) is available on the Young Lives website: <http://www.younglives.org.uk/files/technical-notes/children2019s-perspectives-on-their-young-lives>. The review of child-focused research methods (Johnston 2008b) is also published at <http://www.younglives.org.uk/files/technical-notes/methods-tools-and-instruments-for-use-with-children>.

6 None of the children had been involved in previous pilot projects.

7 This urban area was one of the Young Lives survey sites. Pilot work, however, did not include Young Lives children.

8 The rural area was chosen for piloting work only and is not part of a Young Lives site.

9 For an overview of methods piloted to explore subjective well-being within Young Lives, see G. Crivello, L. Camfield, and M. Woodhead (2009), 'How can children tell us about their wellbeing? Exploring the potential of participatory research approaches within Young Lives', *Social Indicators Research*, 90:51–72.

## 5. The Young Lives qualitative toolkit

The Young Lives qualitative toolkit uses a mixture of talk-based techniques, observational methods, and more interactive and creative approaches, such as drawing, photography and child-led community walks.

Together these aim to elicit information on children's everyday experiences, as well as the views of important adults in their lives, such as caregivers, teachers and community elders. This 'mosaic'<sup>10</sup> approach (Clark and Moss 2001) enables researchers to gain multiple insights and perspectives on children's lived experiences within contexts of poverty, by drawing on diverse sources of data.

The Young Lives toolkit combines 'core' methods (used by all country teams) and 'complementary' methods (which teams can elect to use). The main components of the toolkit are outlined below,

### 5.1. Individual interviews

Semi-structured interviews with children, caregivers, and community members form the primary research method in our toolkit. Our pilot studies showed that semi-structured methods succeeded in generating rich data across all contexts. Indeed, the particular strength of the individual interview lies in its potential for in-depth exploration of personal perspectives (Bryman 2004), allowing for the collation of detailed individual biographies over time. Although interviews have been extensively used in research with young people and children (Wright, O'Flynn and MacDonald 2006; Johansson, Brunnberg and Eriksson 2007), the decision to involve very young children (aged 6) needed careful thought. Young Lives researchers therefore used methods such as drawing and other group activities to engage young children more effectively in the research process. For example, rather than asking children where they went throughout the day, some research teams asked the children to lead them throughout the village and show them where they spent their time throughout the day.

While semi-structured interviews are a popular tool in many qualitative studies, a note of caution is offered with respect to this method. Some evidence suggests that participants in individual interviews may be tempted to present and conform to stereotypical views (Harden et al. 2000); and although individual interviews are less susceptible to group effects, the researcher's presence may hold significance for the responses elicited. As Bryman (2004) notes, it is arguably more difficult for participants, and indeed for the researcher, to challenge views expressed or to diverge from the particular line of questioning within the context of an individual interview. This has been raised as a particular concern in research with children and young people when responses given were found to be more inhibited as a consequence of the power differential between the adult researcher and a young participant (Armstrong, Hill and Secker 2000; Harden et al. 2000). Indeed, the asymmetries of power between adult researchers and young participants living in conditions of poverty has required careful consideration, not only to maintain data quality and maximise children's effective

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<sup>10</sup> The 'Mosaic approach', developed by Clark and Moss (2001), involves the gathering of a range of information, piecing together different elements through reflection and interpretation by listening to children's views and the perspectives of other actors in children's lives.

participation, but also to ensure that ethical standards and principles for social research are upheld (see, for example, Morrow 2009).

## 5.2. Group discussions

Group discussions draw on the premise that ideas and knowledge are not generated in isolation but are a product of social processes (Kitzinger 1994). For example, a group discussion with the mothers of Young Lives children in a community might offer the possibility for participants to agree, modify, or challenge the views expressed by others, thereby enabling the elicitation of a range of different perspectives on the topic of interest (Bloor et al. 2004). Children might find it easier to talk in a group setting if they experience a sense of peer support (Armstrong, Hill and Secker 2000; Hennessy and Heary 2005), or they might prefer to express themselves in writing (Theis 1996).

However, it is important to be mindful of the effects of peers, dominant participants, and group dynamics on the reliability and validity of qualitative data (Whittemore, Chase and Mandle 2001; Aguinaldo 2004; Bloor et al. 2004). Reflection is therefore an important part of the reporting process, so at least two field workers participate in group discussions, one to facilitate discussion, the other to take notes and document group dynamics. In discussions with very young children, a third field worker may be required to attend to their particular needs.

## 5.3. Observational techniques

To complement group and individual methods, observational techniques encourage field workers to seize opportunities for spending time with children in the activities and in the places that are important to them, and to produce notes to complement data reports from interviews and group activities. Field workers record observations of children's classrooms, schools, and homes, and observations of the wider community.

## 5.4. Creative tools for involving children in research

Alongside talk-based and observational methods, the Young Lives qualitative toolkit includes a mix of 'hands-on' research tools. Many of these instruments have been designed to investigate particular areas of children's lived experiences, such as children's time use, perceptions of risk and well-being, sources of social support, and social networks. The individual methods are not confined to any one theme, but are often used interchangeably to generate insights on multiple areas of interest across the themes. They are used in conjunction with individual interviews and help to build rapport, maintain interest, and make the research as enjoyable as possible. Sequencing is important; generally group activities are scheduled to take place early on during the field work, and individual interviews follow. 'Ice-breaker' activities are used at the beginning of group activities to calm nerves and to stimulate subsequent discussion.



The following section outlines a selection of creative methods suitable for generating data in line with the three research themes introduced in 2010.

## Theme 1. Dynamics of childhood poverty

This thematic area explores how the different dimensions of poverty overlap and interact to influence children's life chances. The study seeks to examine major changes, both within households and communities and between the generations, that have an impact on children's well-being and trajectories, and also on the social inclusion/ exclusion of young people.

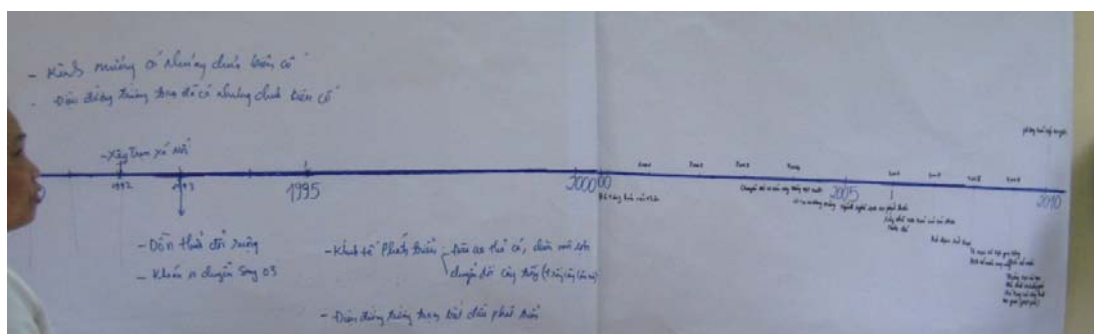
A key line of enquiry focuses on household- and community-level shocks, and how these affect children's lives. The aim is to generate understanding of the contextual opportunities, sources of support (including social protection), and constraints that either support or impede households' efforts to mitigate risk and reduce their vulnerability, including informal and formal institutions and networks.

### Questions

- Households: what significant events/ shocks have occurred? What changes have there been to household membership, location, livelihoods, sources of support? How have children's roles developed? Have household circumstances improved or worsened since the last research visit?
- Residential areas: what are the material and social conditions of children's neighbourhoods or villages? What are the sources of risk and support? In what ways are children's neighbourhoods considered good or bad places for growing up or raising children?
- Wider environments: what have been the key events in the history of Young Lives communities that make them distinct from others? What services, programmes, and other sources of support are available to children and their families, and how are these perceived by Young Lives families? How is the community faring in relation to other communities in the area?

### Methods

#### Community time line



This method may be used as part of an individual interview or collective interview with community representatives or groups of caregivers to encourage in-depth exploration of key events in the past 20 years shaping the community; key challenges within the community; major sources of support; and perspectives on the needs of the community.

The time line can also be used to elicit children's views on their community environments and their roles within the community, including social divisions and solidarity.

### **Community mapping/guided tours**

Guided tours have been used with children as young as 4 years in the UK (Clark and Stratham 2005) and 3 in South Africa (Reynolds 1989) to find out what children do at different times of the day. A further extension of this activity with very young children could be to take photos on the walk and create a map or timetable of their day. The aim of the community mapping is to elicit children's perspectives on the surrounding area, including the



places/things they like/dislike, and the places/things that make them feel safe/unsafe (i.e. places that feel protective or risky). The map can also be used to ask questions about how children spend their time (what they do and where they go); how much choice they have over this; who they do these activities with/for; how they combine different activities; how activities differ at different times of the year; and how they feel about these activities. In some countries, children took photos of the places and people that were important to them, and the photographs were used as prompts for discussion within the individual interview (see also Morrow 2001).

### **Support networks activity**

This activity gathers information from children about the sources of support available to vulnerable groups within their respective communities. This can be done with the aid of a map or a list generated by the group. Children discuss their own experience of services within the community and their views on new programmes that have been introduced. Case-level information can be collected within the context of an individual interview, documenting the people to whom children turned in difficult situations, when they needed help or resources (for example, neighbours, teachers, and so on).

### **Poverty tree**

The poverty-tree exercise aims to elicit children's views on the causes ('roots') and consequences ('fruits') of poverty (Witter and Bokokhe 2004). Children are first asked to imagine what a 'wealthy' family looks like. Ideas are written on pieces of card and then arranged in order of importance, providing context-specific 'wealth indicators'. Participants then draw a big tree and are asked to consider what a 'poor' family looks like; what makes a family like this be 'poor'; and what are the consequences of poverty for a family like this one? For each question, ideas are written on coloured cards – a separate colour for each question. All the cards are then placed on the tree, according to colour. With this method, children are encouraged to think about the links between the causes and impacts of poverty, drawing arrows between the different cards on the tree. Finally, the roles of various actors, including children, parents, and governments in tackling poverty are discussed. Discussions are meant to be 'general' and concerned with poverty dynamics in the community, and not about individual children's experiences.

## Theme 2. Children's experiences of poverty

This theme examines children's well-being and considers how boys and girls experience poverty and related adversities. It focuses on how children experience risks, including structural inequalities and related social exclusion, and the protective effect of public policies and informal sources of support, including children's own actions.

### Questions

- What are the different factors that shape children's well-being over time?
- What are the major sources of risk, vulnerability, resilience, and protection in the lives of children and young people?
- How do policies and the actions of children and young people, their peers, families, and communities affect their well-being and protection?

### Methods

#### Well-being exercise

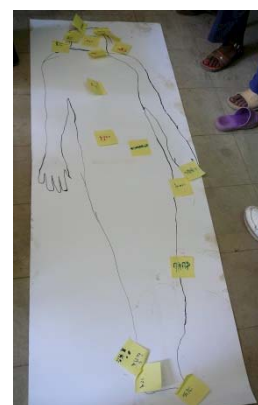
The overall aim of this method is to explore what children consider to be a good or bad life for children of the same age and sex, living in their community; including an examination of sources of risk and protective processes. This method has been successfully adapted and used with adolescents in Sri Lanka (see Armstrong et al. 2004). In Young Lives research, children were given the option to draw images or scenarios



representing 'good' and 'bad' lives for children in their communities, and the drawings were discussed as a group. This generated children's indicators of well-being and ill-being, as well as capturing consensus and disagreement within the group.

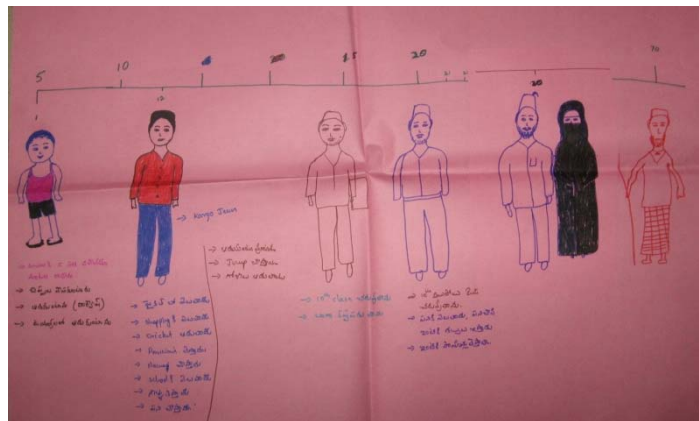
#### Body maps

A further method used by Armstrong et al. (2004) to elicit information about well-being and ill-being was the body-map method (Cornwall 1992). For the purposes of understanding concepts of well-being, this method yields data on psychological and emotional well-being and ill-being as well as physical ailments, especially in cultures where psychological problems have more obvious somatic symptoms. The method involves drawing the outline of a child on a large sheet of paper. Children are then asked to think about what makes them feel bad or feel sick, and to identify the body part or place in the body that feels bad by drawing it on the body. Discussion about the causes of, and possible cures for, these conditions, and who might be able to help them then takes place.



### Life-course Draw-And-Tell

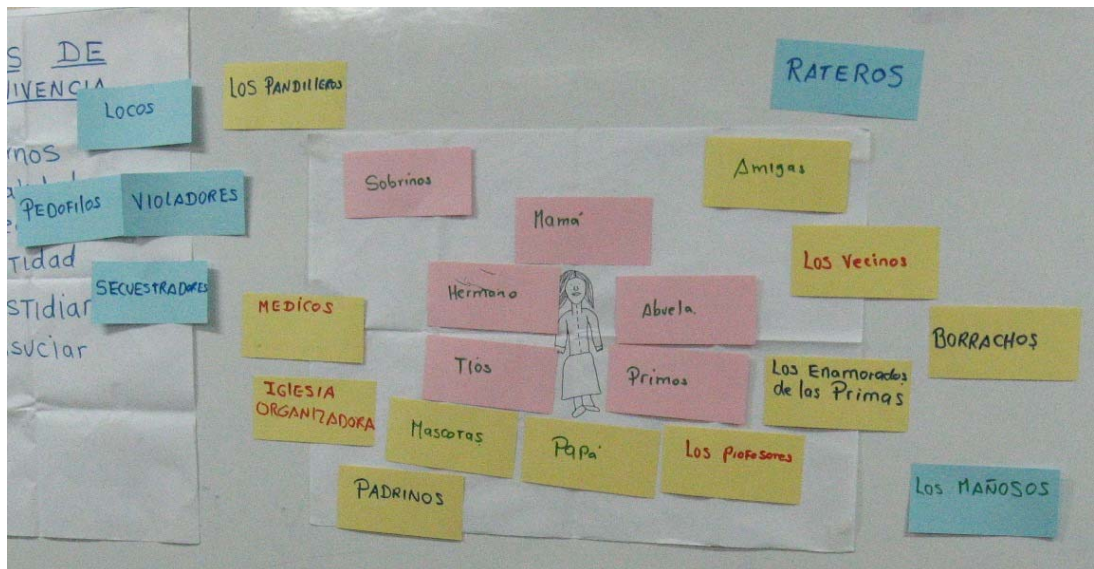
This involves children constructing a time line of their life which is then discussed in detail as part of an individual interview. This includes what children remember as the important moments of their past (both happy and sad) and why these were memorable; who helped them during times of difficulty; how they feel about their current situation (i.e.



subjective well-being); and their future expectations (extent to which these are shared by their parents, what support/ resources they would need to achieve these, and what could prevent them).

In some countries, the method was used with adults to elicit information about their own childhood experiences and how these compare with their own children's experiences.

### Who matters?



This method seeks to uncover the various sources of support available to children by asking them about 'who matters in their lives?' and who they turn to in difficult times; for example, family, teachers, police, and neighbours (Woodhead 1998; Armstrong et al. 2004). This can be done individually, or as a group. In this exercise, children make a drawing or chart with themselves at the centre and other important people in a circle around them. Children are then asked questions about why these people are important, how they help, and what responsibilities children feel towards them. They also talk about who they turned to in the past when they needed help (for example, with homework, to earn money, to confide in someone). They can also indicate the people by whom they feel threatened and discuss how they protect themselves against these groups.

### **Theme 3. Learning, time-use and life transitions**

Children and young people who are living in poverty balance multiple expectations and responsibilities, which are related to school, work, and family life. The Young Lives study is able to examine the factors that shape children's roles and responsibilities, the choices that children have in relation to how they spend their time, what they are able to learn (both formally and informally), and how these choices impact on their life trajectories.

Children learn and develop knowledge, social understanding, and cultural identity through participation in a range of activities. Boys and girls develop skills and capabilities through their roles and responsibilities at home and in the community, as well as at school. Thus negotiating a balance between family expectations, school, work, play, leisure, and other valued activities is a feature of most children's experience.

We are particularly interested in the ways in which children's participation in work and school intersect with poverty and inequalities, and with processes of modernisation, and how we are able to address these policy-relevant issues from a longitudinal perspective, examining the multiple transitions from early childhood into adulthood, as well as intergenerational processes.

#### *Questions*

- What role does school play in breaking the cycle of poverty?
- What is the significance of work in the lives of children and young people?
- How does poverty affect how children and young people use their time, and how does their time use affect poverty?
- What are the most important skill-acquisition processes for children and young people as they prepare for their adult lives?
- What factors shape the major transitions that boys and girls experience from infancy to adulthood, and what are the outcomes?

#### *Methods*

##### **Activity tables and worksheets**

This method can be used to collect information about children's daily activities. For example, Punch (2001) asked children to list the various activities and tasks that they knew how to do, such as agricultural or domestic tasks. Worksheets were then used which further detailed the information gathered through activity tables. For example, worksheets asked children who did what tasks in the household, who helped with the tasks, who never did them, and at what age people learned to do the task. This information gives a good indication of the life skills obtained through domestic chores at different ages.

##### **Time-use bucket activity**

The purpose of this method is to gather information about the various activities that children perform inside and outside their household, and to learn about the people they spend time with while doing these activities; whether they feel happy/unhappy with these activities; if they find them useful at present and future times; and what sort of thing they





gain/learn from them. For this exercise, buckets representing different activities are used for children to record the time spent on each activity (for example, using marbles to represent hours in the day). Discussions are also held about what activities are considered to be work, and children's preferences for the types of activity they are required to perform.

### Time-use diaries

The main purpose of the diary method is to gather information about the various activities that children perform inside and outside their household, and to learn about the people they spend time with while doing these activities, and how they feel about the things they do, or if they find them useful at present and future times, and what sorts of thing they gain/learn from them (see, for example, Punch 1997). A week-long diary was used to capture children's time use and how they feel about the things they do. These were used in cases where children could read and write, although a tick list with pictures and colours could have been used with illiterate children (see Boyden and Ennew 1997). It was important to review and discuss the diaries in one-on-one discussions, since children often give partial accounts of what they do (Punch 1997) and it may be difficult to capture multiple and simultaneous activities (such as combining work and play) in written diaries (Punch 1997; Sapkota and Sharma 1996).

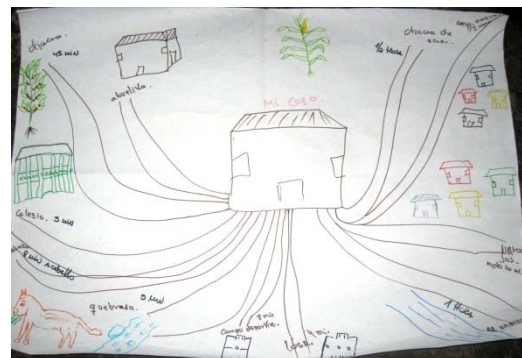


### Vignettes, story completion and exploring news headlines

Vignettes can be described as a 'story-completion' game using words or pictures (see Woodhead 1998; Dawes 1992). In Young Lives, the first few lines of a story were developed to reflect some of the issues that face children in the different age groups and in the different research contexts. Children were then asked questions such as: 'What will happen next?', 'What should X do and why?' and 'Who might help?' Clippings from recent newspapers and magazines also generate group discussions on relevant topics. Some of the topics covered by this set of activities included decisions to leave school, experiences of school transitions, early marriage, and peer bullying.

### Mobility maps

Harpham et al. (2005) asked groups of ten children to draw their house at the centre of a piece of paper and then identify the locations of some of the main places they go to. Sapkota and Sharma (1996) also used this method and then developed themes further in individual methods. Qualitative researchers used this method as a prompt for discussion about freedoms to move around, and about the spatial aspect of children's roles and responsibilities: where children are allowed to go, where they are not allowed to go, why, whether they make the decision to go/not to go, and who accompanies them to these places throughout the day.



## 6. Data analysis

Data are cleaned, anonymised as fully as possible, translated, and coded thematically by country teams. Individual and collective interviews, group discussions and activities, are all transcribed as soon as feasible after data collection. The transcribed data are then coded, using either Atlas ti or, in the case of Vietnam, NVivo. A meta-framework for coding the data was developed collaboratively, based on the agreed core research themes and key concepts (see Appendix 1). All country teams use the same broad higher-level codes (at the family and super-family level) of the framework to enhance consistency and enable comparability of data across countries and between rounds. Country teams and Oxford researchers then have the freedom to construct lower levels of the coding framework in line with their specific research interests and lines of enquiry.

Qualitative researchers in this study come from multiple disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, education, social policy, and public health, and therefore each researcher may approach the data from a slightly different theoretical perspective. Broadly speaking, however, our approach is situated within a constructivist–interpretative paradigm, which assumes ‘a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 24).

We undertake a mix of both thematic and biographical (case-study) analyses. Thematic analysis allows us to develop a broad understanding of phenomena of interest within our data and to make comparisons between cases and across contexts; while case-level analysis permits us to gain a more in-depth, context-specific appreciation of children’s and caregivers’ lived experiences and the processes shaping those experiences. In thematic analysis, the researcher first summarises the data and identifies themes in accordance with the specific research questions, then graduates from a ‘descriptive’ to an ‘interpretative level’ (Braun and Clarke 2006).

For case-study analysis, multiple sources of data, from different time periods, can be drawn upon to build up a rich narrative around one case or set of cases. Cases that are illustrative of particular phenomena, and which can provide rich (albeit highly context-specific) accounts of how and why certain social processes occur, may also be selected.

Qualitative longitudinal analysis of themes and cases is also possible. It ‘explores the interplay of the temporal and cultural dimensions of social life’ (Neale and Flowerdew 2003), in interaction with changing material circumstances. Analysis conducted so far by Young Lives covers multiple rounds, when children were at different ages, and it seeks to explain changes in their experiences, perceptions and life trajectories, and the role of poverty. Analysis is both ‘intra-case’ (explaining changes within a case, such as a child or household over time), and ‘inter-case’ (across or between cases, comparing and contrasting multiple cases) (Thomson 2007). We use a number of techniques to manage analysis of an ever-increasing volume of qualitative data, such as application of the same coding frame across rounds (including codes to pick up on ‘changes’), and tables and matrices to organise thematic analysis within and across cases.

## 7. Challenges and lessons learned

### **Semi-structured approaches**

Use of the semi-structured interview as our key research instrument ensures that a comparable, longitudinal, data set can be generated across diverse contexts. It is also a focused tool for generating data with individuals within the context of a time-limited field visit (that is, 15 days in each site). Nevertheless this does present challenges in terms of ensuring that children and young people are able to engage as fully as possible in the research process, particularly in contexts where children may not be expected to speak out. The best interviews are those that develop as 'conversations' and where flexibility enhances rather than diminishes the relevance and strength of the data.

### **Secondary analysis of qualitative data**

Data analysis and dissemination are carried out in-country by local research teams and by researchers based at Oxford. Secondary analysis of qualitative data can be challenging even for those working in their own language and culture. Secondary analysis is often conducted at a distance (geographic, cultural, linguistic and so on). To minimise loss of contextual richness, country teams produce in-depth data gathering reports and initial data reviews after each round of data generation; they are in regular contact to discuss emerging findings and interpretations and they co-author papers with Oxford-based researchers.

### **Complexity and quantity of data generated**

Managing a large, multilingual, multi-media longitudinal data set is complicated. Young Lives has a dedicated data manager who works with country teams to clean the data and store them within a central database. We have also found it particularly helpful to coordinate our analysis around three study-wide research themes, as this provides a clear focus for interrogation of the data. It also enables the development of cohesive messages and encourages the integration of both qualitative and quantitative analytical approaches.

### **Flexibility of approach**

Young Lives is a study that is both methodologically and conceptually complex. It has therefore been important to take a flexible, iterative approach to the development of the qualitative component. Striking the balance between ensuring comparability of data sets across contexts, while encouraging creativity and the freedom to respond to local priorities, is inevitably challenging. Young Lives prides itself on strong collaborative relationships across study countries and accords importance to creating space for cross-country learning and sharing (e.g. through bi-annual international team meetings).

### **Attrition**

In any longitudinal study, attrition is inevitable. Young Lives country teams track the children between rounds, even if they change location, and strive to maintain good links with local authorities and communities. Fortunately the attrition rate has been very low – 2.8 per cent across the whole sample between Rounds 1 and 3 – and is mainly due to household mobility. However, as the study progresses through subsequent rounds of data collection,

increased mobility among the older cohort for education and employment, as well as potential respondent fatigue, is likely to become an important consideration.<sup>11</sup>

## 8. Outputs

A variety of outputs are produced from the qualitative data. They include mixed methods outputs that combine qualitative and survey analysis. Outputs include the following:

- Academic journal articles, working papers and book chapters and contributions to methodological discussion and development
- Papers commissioned from the team to feed into reports by other organisations (e.g. Plan International report *Because I Am A Girl*)
- Conference, seminars and teaching presentations
- Communications materials, such as two books of Young Lives child profiles (*Nothing is impossible for me*, published in 2009, and *Changing Lives in a Changing World*, published in 2012) and information for the study website ([www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)). School textbooks in Ethiopia have drawn on this material
- Policy papers and briefs
- Information leaflets for the study participants.

Insights gained at each round of qualitative research also influence changes in the questions and coded responses contained in the main survey.

## 9. Ethics

As a study which tracks children and their families over a long period of time, Young Lives encounters a number of ethics questions that arise from managing and maintaining long-term relationships necessary for the study of children growing up in poverty. In response to frequent requests to share our experiences of carrying out both longitudinal research and research with children in developing countries, we have been writing extensively on research ethics to discuss some of the questions raised, and some of the challenges we have faced and how we approach them (see Young Lives Working Paper 53 which also contains the Memorandum of Understanding developed by the team for use in each research round).

Among the lessons we have learned are the following:

- Attention to research ethics needs to be ongoing, and continually revisited
- An understanding of the context and power relationships between adults and children, are all crucial for how ethics works in practice
- That ethics questions raised in qualitative research are also raised in survey and policy research.

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<sup>11</sup> For more discussion on cohort maintenance, see Young Lives Methods Guide, Cohort Maintenance: Tracking and Attrition, July 2011, available at: <http://www.younglives.org.uk/files/methods-guide/methods-guide-cohort-maintenance>

## 10. Next steps

A further round of qualitative data collection with the existing sub-sample is scheduled for 2014. Two more rounds of survey-data collection with the full sample of all children and households are planned for 2013 and 2015.

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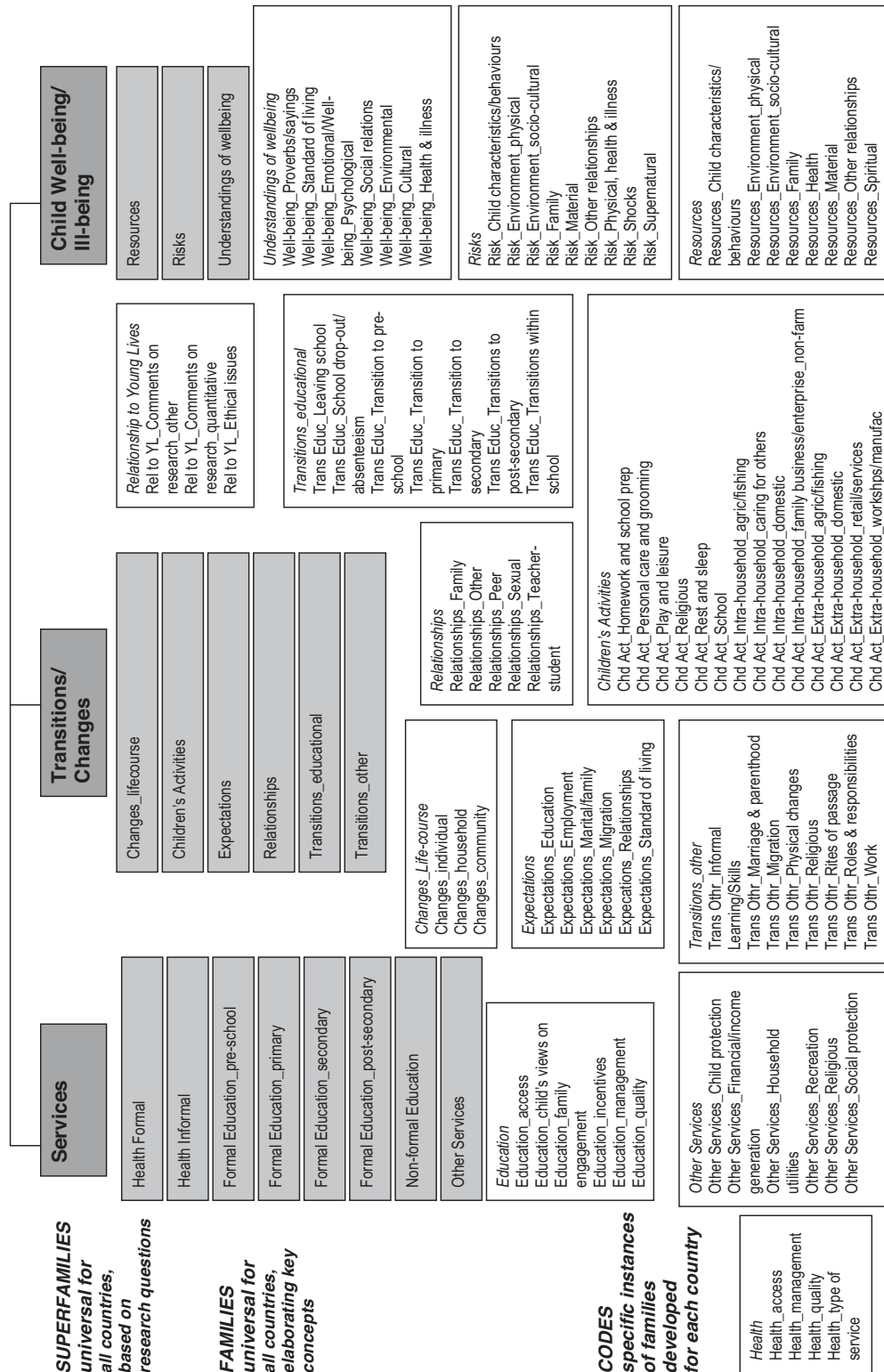
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# Appendix 1. Young Lives Qual-3 Coding Frame (revised Feb 2011)



# Young Lives Longitudinal Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers

This document is a reproduction of a fieldwork guide produced collaboratively by an international team of researchers taking part in the Young Lives study. Young Lives is a long-term study of childhood poverty in four countries: Ethiopia, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam. This document is the manual that guided the first of four planned rounds of data collection in 2007 as part of a longitudinal qualitative research design. The longitudinal qualitative study is tracking 50 children in each study country, using a case-study approach to document their changing life trajectories over time. This Guide gives a short description of our rationale and ways of working. Full details of how the research was implemented are contained in the Fieldwork Guide for each data collection round.

We share these documents for other researchers carrying out social research with children and young people in poverty to adapt, use and develop in their own work. We have tried to maintain as much of the original document as possible; this means that the language is directed towards field researchers working as part of Young Lives. Internally, we refer to the different rounds of data collection as 'Qual-1', 'Qual-2', and 'Qual-3', and these are the terms used in this document. It should be read in conjunction with the *Young Lives Longitudinal Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers* (Young Lives Technical Note 27) which provides background and an overview of the longitudinal qualitative research to date.

This document was drafted in early 2007 before we embarked upon the first round of our research. We have checked and updated it ready for publication in this format in early 2013. We would be very interested to hear from anyone who adapts or uses any of the ideas contained within this Guide for their own work.

## About Young Lives

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty, involving 12,000 children in 4 countries over 15 years. It is led by a team in the Department of International Development at the University of Oxford in association with research and policy partners in the 4 study countries: Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam.

Through researching different aspects of children's lives, we seek to improve policies and programmes for children.

## Young Lives Partners

Young Lives is coordinated by a small team based at the University of Oxford, led by Professor Jo Boyden.

- *Ethiopian Development Research Institute, Ethiopia*
- *Centre for Economic and Social Sciences, Andhra Pradesh, India*
- *Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visvavidyalayam (Women's University), Andhra Pradesh, India*
- *Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (Group for the Analysis of Development), Peru*
- *Instituto de Investigación Nutricional (Institute for Nutrition Research), Peru*
- *Center for Analysis and Forecasting, Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam*
- *General Statistics Office, Vietnam*
- *Child and Youth Studies Group (CREET), The Open University, UK*
- *Oxford Department of International Development (ODID), University of Oxford, UK*
- *Save the Children*

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