



ETHICAL RESEARCH INVOLVING CHILDREN

Centre for Children
and Young People



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NEW ZEALAND

PAYMENT AND COMPENSATION

Payments to young researchers in Malawi

Background context:

During a research project on children's transport and mobility in sub-Saharan Africa young people, (mostly under 18 years old) were invited from secondary schools in Malawi, Ghana and South Africa, to train as young researchers to collect data from their peers alongside adult researchers (www.dur.ac.uk/child.mobility).

The ethical challenge:

The research team faced the dilemma of whether the young researchers should be paid for undertaking their research. Was it enough to provide educational benefits from training, certificates, photographs and watches? Hard questions were asked about whether the young researchers were engaged in work, in which case was it unethical not to pay them, or would paying them amount to engaging child labour? Some of the young people participating in the project had sacrificed time in which they would otherwise have been engaged in income earning activities or unpaid work supporting their households' livelihoods. The choices were to pay or not to pay?; to offer financial compensation or payment in kind?; and, if to pay, then how much?

Choices made:

After much discussion, it was decided by the research team that the young people were collecting data for our research project in the same way as graduates employed as research assistants. Therefore, it was considered only morally justifiable that they should be recompensed for their work with modest cash payments, in addition to other material benefits (notebooks, watches, training). In follow-up with the young researchers it emerged that while they universally appreciated the financial compensation received, some reportedly felt the payments were too small. Furthermore, it emerged that their adult parents and guardians clearly had expectations that the young people would receive money for participating in the project.

Reflexive questions/considerations:

According to Malawi's employment legislation (Employment Act 2000) 14 years is the minimum employment age and those 14 to 18 years should not work in any activity that is harmful to their health, safety, education, morals or development, or prejudicial to their school attendance. We believe the young researchers were engaged in an educationally beneficial activity (and indeed they identified many benefits including skills, increased confidence, new wider social contacts) and we took care to ensure their safety and health. Unfortunately, however, one training workshop was held during the school term (due to logistical difficulties of coordinating a three-country study) and some of the young researchers (who

consented to participate as well as their parents/guardians) complained of difficulties to catch up what they had missed.

Malawi's National Code of Conduct on Child Labour (2004) states children should be paid the same wage as adults. It is difficult to assess whether the young researchers were paid the same wage as adults because we did not employ adults with similar qualifications, or to do the same work – the adult research assistants had tertiary-level education and were tasked with more rigorous data collection. Our experience raises more general questions where young people undertake research:

- What does local employment legislation or codes of conduct on child labour state about employment of children below 18 years?
- How can researchers ensure fair participation of young people as researchers without exploitation or harm?
- In what ways can young people of school age in poor countries engage in research without negative consequences to their education, loss of income or support to their household?

References

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