



ETHICAL RESEARCH INVOLVING CHILDREN

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PAYMENT AND COMPENSATION

Payment in different contexts: How can payment reflect local considerations?

Background context:

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty, involving 12,000 children growing up over 15 years in Ethiopia, the state of Andhra Pradesh in India, Peru and Vietnam. Two cohorts of children – a younger cohort who were born in 2001-02 and an older cohort born in 1994-95 – are being followed. A variety of survey and qualitative methods are being used to collect data with children, parents, and others in communities. See www.younglives.org.uk

The ethical challenge:

The decision to compensate or pay research participants raises ethical questions. Payments may be made to reimburse expenses; to compensate for time, inconvenience and possible discomfort; to show appreciation for participants' help; or to pay for people's help. However, payments should not be made to encourage people to take part as an incentive as no persuasion or pressure of any kind should be put on people to become involved with the research (Alderson & Morrow, 2004). Local considerations also impact on how decisions are made regarding payment and remuneration for participation in research, such that different forms of compensation may be needed to suit different locations within the same study.

Ethical dilemmas surrounding payment for research participation are clearly demonstrated in contexts of acute poverty such as the Young Lives study locations. During the first round of qualitative research, the research team noted that people perceived Young Lives as an aid agency and money received as aid. In the second round, researchers paid more attention to explaining that Young Lives does not provide any aid to the community in general and to the research households or children in particular. However, at each round, fieldworkers report that they are frequently asked for help. (This is not specific to developing countries but happens everywhere). If there are misconceptions about the purpose of research, such as bringing benefit to individual children and/or being perceived as a form of aid, an ethical dilemma in regard to informed consent is also raised. Is consent freely given when the purpose of research and payment is misunderstood?

Choices made:

Each country research team deals with compensation for people's time in locally specific ways, reflecting cultural contexts about the value of people's time, their willingness to undertake research activities for the common good, and the reality of poverty and not having the capacity to miss a day's wages to spend time talking with researchers.

Some country teams pay respondents, including children, for their participation. Others

give small gifts as a “thank you”. Norms and patterns of reciprocity, notions of community, and/or doing what the government tells you (for example, in Vietnam where government census enumerators are administering the survey) are likely to affect people’s participation. However, paying respondents (adults and older cohort children) to compensate them for their time may cause some confusion. For example, in Ethiopia, children were encouraged to use the money to buy school materials.

Other country research teams (Peru, for example) give small gifts as a “thank you”, as well as some supplies to local schools. In India, research teams provide some resources to schools (for example) as requested by local community leaders to benefit all children in the locality, and up to 2009, did not make direct payment to research participants. However, in some cases, research respondents consider it unfair that they are giving up their time but benefits are for everyone in the community.

Reflexive considerations:

- The question of remuneration to Young Lives’ participants is becoming increasingly important as economies become more market-oriented. For example, in Andhra Pradesh, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which pays household members at least Rs.100/- for a day’s manual labour, has recently been implemented. Respondents are now aware of the financial value of their time, and are more likely to expect monetary compensation. Thus the decision has been made to compensate respondents for their time in subsequent research rounds.
- Young Lives may run a risk of people refusing to participate in future; fieldworkers report that it is already difficult to persuade people to continue to be involved. This is not to suggest that people should not be paid when they most need it – after all, the duress to accept monetary incentives is created by poverty, not by the incentives. Rather, it is to suggest that care has to be exercised, and awareness that it may be difficult for people living in poverty to refuse requests to participate in the research.

References

Alderson, P. & Morrow, V. (2004). *Ethics, social research and consulting with children and young people*. Barking: Barnardos.

Morrow, V. (2009). *Young Lives working paper*. Available online www.younglives.org.uk

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