

## Section 1: Young Lives – A Multi-disciplinary Longitudinal Study of Childhood Poverty

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Young Lives is an international study which is tracing the changing lives of 12,000 children over 15 years. It is following two groups of children, with approximately equal numbers of girls and boys, from poor households in Ethiopia, Peru, Vietnam, and the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in India. The first group were born in 2001-02 and the second in 1994–95. The research uses a range of methods to provide evidence and insights into the changing nature of child poverty at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The core research questions are about the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and about the means by which poverty is transmitted across generations. The study's goal is to offer credible evidence for use in policy engagement to ensure that children are considered in the shaping and implementation of pro-poor and poverty reduction strategies.

Drawn from each of the four major regions of the developing world, the study countries have diverse socio-economic and political characteristics. Twenty sites were selected in each country to illustrate diversity in terms of rural and urban location, ethnicity and religion. The sample comprises approximately 2,000 children from the younger age-group, and 1,000 children from the older age-group in each country. The sampled children were selected randomly from children of the right age in each of the study sites.

Young Lives takes a multi-dimensional view of poverty, seeing it as complex, dynamic and manifested primarily by diverse material disadvantages, susceptibility to risk and constraint on choice. Poverty is very often linked to social exclusion and exacerbated by restricted access to basic services, notably health, education and social protection. Childhood is the major analytic focus of the study and the children and their households are key units of observation and sources of evidence. The study measures children's experiences of poverty and its outcomes across many domains of well-being and development, including the physical, psycho-social, and cognitive. The study design recognises that children's lives are inseparable from the settings, institutions, systems of relationship and cultural processes in which their health, well-being, learning and development are embedded.

One of the major strengths of Young Lives is its innovative and comprehensive methodology, which harnesses the power of longitudinal research to illuminate the patterns of change and causal processes affecting children as they move from infancy to adulthood. It collects qualitative and quantitative data from children, caregivers, siblings, teachers and other community representatives. Young Lives has several distinct but linked components:

- **Child, household, and community surveys** – child, household and community questionnaires are designed to regularly gather information on the changing context of each community, the demographic and economic composition of households, children's access to and experience of health and education services, their daily activities and experiences, attitudes to work and school, and hopes and aspirations for the future. They also collect time-use data for family members, and information about children's weight, height and cognitive skills, including maths, language and literacy.
- **Qualitative longitudinal research** – 50 case study children from each country were selected from both age cohorts of the main sample, and four rounds of qualitative data collection documented the changing trajectories of their individual lives. Each round had a key theme. Fieldworkers used multiple methods based on observation, semi-structured interviewing, visual methods and group activities to record the understandings and perspectives of the children and the key adults in their lives.
- **School surveys** – a study of a sample of schools in Young Lives sites, including schools attended by the cohort children in all four countries, was introduced in 2010. The school surveys examine the student, class, teacher and school factors associated with the quality of learning outcomes at primary and secondary level. By linking information about schools and education quality to individual children and their households, the surveys provide evidence about the effectiveness of education in combatting inequality and preventing the intergenerational transfer of poverty. The survey design in each country is based on consultation with education stakeholders to ensure that they offer evidence relevant to current national policy. Data are collected through survey methods, including cognitive tests and psychosocial measures.
- **Sub-studies** – these are usually shorter enquiries based on sub-samples, using qualitative methods or surveys. They are based on context-specific issues, such as orphanhood in Ethiopia or the impact of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India.
- **Collaborative research initiatives** – Young Lives has been involved in a number of collaborative research initiatives which either match Young Lives data with other datasets, or use them to help frame new research projects. These initiatives include studies of health and children's access to school, environment and family life in India and the UK, and the prevalence, timing, and benefits of recovery from early childhood growth failure in all four study countries.

The cohort surveys, school surveys and qualitative longitudinal research components are part of the same iterative research cycle, with each building on and elucidating the others. Analysis of survey data indicates research subjects and topics for more intensive focus, and provides patterns into which more detailed information is likely to fit. Qualitative case study data inform the design of the child survey instrument, and are used to identify research issues for inclusion in later surveys and possible new models for analysing survey data. These interactions between different types of data and analysis are a continuous process in Young Lives.

This approach has produced a unique, multilingual dataset which situates children's experiences of poverty in relation to the people around them, and the socio-cultural context, institutions, services and policies that shape their lives and opportunities. This dataset is being used to:

- understand how children are affected by poverty at every stage of their lives, and how boys and girls are affected differently.
- monitor the impact of macro-economic changes on children and their families.
- learn why some children do better than others by capturing relationships between diverse social forces including gender, religion, caste and ethnicity.
- trace the ways in which poverty is passed on across generations and examine why some households either move out of or fall into poverty.
- explore how poverty exacerbates or is exacerbated by other forms of adversity such as environmental and family shocks.
- examine perspectives on services and programmes, and understand whether and how households and children benefit from provision.
- analyse the impact of policies and services on children's life course and outcomes.
- trace the trends, processes of change and policy challenges that each study country faces, and consider the implications for other countries with similar trajectories of growth and development.

## A Guide to Young Lives Research

This Guide provides an overview of how the Young Lives study has been carried out, giving insight into the diverse methods and processes involved in a complex longitudinal study made up of many different components. It offers lessons on building and managing research partnerships, designing and conducting multidisciplinary research, managing and analysing data, and using research to influence policy.

The Guide has been updated in 2017 by Virginia Morrow with Gina Crivello, Rosaleen Cunningham, Patricia Espinoza Revollo, Rhiannon Moore, and Anne Solon, based on the 2011 Young Lives Methods Guide written by Karen Brock and Caroline Knowles. It reflects on 15 years of experience, with each section summarising a different part of the research process, and considering:

- what has been done in each area
- what challenges have arisen
- how ways of working have changed and developed
- what lessons have been learned.

The sections of the Guide are:

1. [Young Lives: Study Overview](#)
2. [What Can Comparative Country Research Tell Us About Child Poverty?](#)
3. [What Can Longitudinal Research Tell Us About Children's Life-chances?](#)
4. [Research Ethics](#)
5. [Sampling](#)
6. [Child, Household and Community Surveys](#)
7. [Qualitative Longitudinal Research](#)
8. [School Surveys](#)
9. [Sub-studies](#)
10. [Piloting: Testing Instruments and Training Field Teams](#)
11. [Planning and Managing Fieldwork](#)
12. [Cohort Maintenance: Tracking and Attrition](#)
13. [Computer-assisted Personal Interviewing](#)
14. [Methods for Analysis](#)

If you are interested in more details about any particular aspect of the research process or section of the Guide, please email [younglives@younglives.org.uk](mailto:younglives@younglives.org.uk).

As well as producing academic and policy-related publications, Young Lives communicates research findings through numerous platforms, including a series of illustrated mixed methods books profiling children's biographies over time, social media, videos, podcasts, photography, and data visualisations.

We have also documented the impact of our research. See [Capturing a Picture of Change](#) and our [Theory of Change](#).