

Section 6: Child, Household and Community Surveys

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The longitudinal survey at the centre of Young Lives consists of a set of questionnaires administered by interviewers every three or four years with all 12,000 children, their primary caregivers, and key informants in their communities. Together with Young Lives qualitative longitudinal research, which involves successive rounds of in-depth research with sub-samples of the children, and the Young Lives school survey, it forms the foundation of the longitudinal study.

Young Lives views [childhood poverty as a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon](#) (Boyden and Dornan 2011). To understand more about its causes, consequences and transmission across generations, the study must therefore gather a broad range of data about the Young Lives children, structured to allow both [multi-level and longitudinal analysis of a range of determinants and outcomes of poverty](#). To achieve this, each survey round consists of three closely linked components – child, household and community context surveys – which make use of several tools and are applied to different respondents.

- **The child/individual survey** has been designed to be administered to the sample children after they reached the age of 8, and therefore provides data at the level of the individual. In these surveys children were asked about their perceptions of well-being, their daily activities, their attitudes to school and work, how they feel they are treated by others, and their future aspirations. In subsequent rounds, the child survey also asked children about their time use, mobility, and complete school histories. In early rounds, when the Younger Cohort children were under 8 years old, similar questions about the health, well-being and care of the child from birth onwards were asked to the caregiver as part of the household survey.
- **The household survey** covers basic information about all household members, as well as covering a range of subjects including parental background and education, livelihood activities, assets, time use, food and non-food consumption and expenditure, recent economic change, social capital, household members' health, and access to basic services. The children's primary caregivers were asked about child care dynamics, their perceptions of, and attitudes towards, a range of subjects, and their aspirations for their child and family.
- **The community context survey** provides background information about the social, economic and environmental context of each community where the Young Lives children live, covering topics including population, ethnicity, religion and language, economic activity and employment, and infrastructure. It also provides a detailed information map of the health, education and child protection services that are available to community members.

As well as content, key considerations in designing the protocols for each component have been respondent burden, question clarity, potential for recall error, cultural sensitivity and developing clear definitions of basic terms like 'household'. For the community context survey, central considerations have been devising questions suitable for both rural and urban settings, and deciding what kind of community profile is necessary to inform the analysis of the household and child data.

In each round, the [research protocols are piloted and revised](#) before they are finalised, and detailed justification documents drawn up for each section that explain why particular approaches and emphases were favoured. While some basic household data were collected in each round, each component was reviewed and new modules have been introduced to reflect the age of children and the issues that they and their families face at each phase of childhood, spanning infancy through to early adulthood. Adaptations have also taken account of learning from each experience of applying the survey, and of conceptual and theoretical developments over time. Country-specific questions about policies and programmes affecting children are also included. Throughout the five rounds, the survey design has been adapted and altered in several different areas.

- **Respondents:** The principal survey respondents are the Young Lives children, their adult carers, and key informants in the community. In each round, however, there are changes in the distribution of questions between these informants; as the children get older, more questions are directly addressed to them. Some rounds have also introduced new informants. Since Round 3, for example, Younger Cohort siblings have been interviewed on a number of topics, and the community survey became more focused on services, requiring different key informants to be sought.
- **Content of sections:** Retaining core content unchanged across rounds is an important principle of longitudinal survey design, as this allows direct comparison between rounds. Nonetheless, while most section content does not change, some alterations are essential to take account of life course and contextual changes. Some sections have been developed to address questions emerging from baseline data collected in Round 1, while others have been strengthened to gather more detailed information in particular thematic areas such as health and education. Other sections have become shorter as questions have been dropped where information is unlikely to have changed – for example, about a child's first language. In some places, questions – for example, those about political capital – have been dropped in particular countries because of anticipated contextual bias.

- **Number of sections:** In some cases, whole questionnaire sections are revised or removed to reflect life-course changes, such as the pregnancy, delivery and breast-feeding section of the Round 1 Younger Cohort child survey. In others cases, new sections are added. This can either reflect a shift of emphasis in the conceptual framework of the whole study – such as the addition of a consumption and expenditure section in the Round 2 household questionnaire or the addition of a employment and earnings module since Round 4 for the Older Cohort – or to the need to add country-specific sections, which usually gather data about specific policy initiatives of particular relevance to childhood poverty.
- **Style of questions and answers:** The way that some questions are asked has altered according to what has been learned in previous rounds. For instance, some children were upset by negative questions asked in Round 2, so these were reframed positively in Round 3. Faces illustrating different moods were chosen to supplement words on some Likert-type answer scales in Round 3; these were discontinued in Round 4 on the premise that 12 and 19 year olds were old enough to understand the scales without the help of illustrations, and that the faces were not strictly representative of the answer scales.

There are several overarching challenges involved in designing research protocols for each successive round. These include:

- maintaining a balance between preserving the continuity of core questions for longitudinal purposes and responding to shifts and changes in contextual debates on poverty and development policy.
- ensuring that questions are age-appropriate and adequately reflect variations in outlook, capacities and communication skills of the children in different countries.
- ensuring that each of the three principal components complements the others, and that overlaps between them contribute to triangulation.

- keeping the surveys at a reasonable length, without overburdening respondents.

Developing the Round 1 survey

The research protocols for the Round 1 survey, carried out in 2002, were designed to provide baseline information both for subsequent rounds, and for the detailed thematic components that were included in the original plan for Young Lives. They aimed to produce data that favoured breadth over depth (Attawell 2003).

The process of developing the surveys was informed by a [pilot study in South Africa](#) and by the varied disciplinary perspectives of the study team. A literature review which drew together information about poverty and children from different sources was used to identify key topics for analysis. This led to the prioritisation of six child welfare outcomes: physical health, nutrition, mental health, developmental stage, life skills, and perceptions of well-being. Having identified these key outcomes, flow charts were constructed to elaborate causal pathways and determinants for each outcome at the micro and macro levels. Three key ‘storylines’ – livelihoods, social relations, and access to services – cut across all six flow charts, as well as reflected contemporary development narratives (Attawell 2003). The outcomes and storylines formed the conceptual foundation of the Round 1 survey protocols. Table 1 summarises the content of the child and household questionnaires that emerged from this process.

Devising specific interview questions, well-being measures and child development assessments involved a lengthy process of negotiation and compromise as the enormous number of potential questions was whittled down to those considered essential to provide both adequate breadth and a balance of variables useful for both cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis.

The design of some questions drew heavily from existing instruments. The caregiver mental health questions, for

Table 1. Content of child, household and community questionnaires at Round 1

	Household questionnaire	Child questionnaire	Community questionnaire
Both cohorts	Household composition Caregiver background Child health Household livelihoods Economic changes and events Socio-economic status Social status Child height and weight		Physical environment Social environment Infrastructure and amenities Economy Health and education Prices
Younger Cohort only (age 6 to 18 months)	Pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding Child care Caregiver mental health	Children too young to answer direct questions	
Older Cohort only (age 7 to 8 years)	Child mental health Child education and daily activities	Perceptions of well-being Social capital School and work Health Literacy, numeracy and child development	

example, were derived from a World Health Organization questionnaire; the questions on work in the daily activities section of the Older Cohort household survey were based on a standardised, tested International Labour Organization survey methodology; and the child development test comprised Raven's Colour Progressive Matrices, a psychometric tool built around a series of visual problems, requiring the child to identify the missing elements in a series of patterns. It was selected as a non-verbal tool that has been widely used in cross-cultural research. Other areas used relatively new conceptual frameworks – such as livelihoods, social capital, vulnerability and coping strategies – where there was less experience of measurement to draw on. Here, researchers relied more heavily on their own expertise and innovation to design simple methods that could be administered as part of a large survey instrument.

Round 2: learning from Round 1 and looking to the future

Research protocol design for Round 2, carried out in 2006, took into account many of the same key considerations that informed the design of Round 1. In addition, it also had to:

- respond to challenges which emerged from using particular questions and methods in Round 1
- respond to findings which emerged from Round 1
- respond to contextual changes in the research and policy arenas
- reflect the life-course stage influencing the two cohorts, now aged around 5 and 12 years old respectively
- reflect differences in policy, culture and research team priorities between the four countries by including more country-specific questions and sections
- take into consideration how the survey would be linked with the first round of the qualitative longitudinal research component, which was planned for the following year.

The design of protocols for Round 2 reflected an enhanced commitment to a strong child focus. The protocol design of the child component was influenced by qualitative researchers with expertise in child development, and the child focus was reflected by interviewing 12-year-old children directly about their own perspectives and aspirations (Johnson 2008). This raised some challenges. As a Young Lives researcher observed: 'potentially the most important issue about conducting research with children as opposed to adults is that there exists an even greater power differential between adult researchers and child participants than between two adults, due to the lesser power and freedoms of children relative to adults in all cultures' (Johnson 2008: 3). This power differential was particularly stark in some areas of the study countries, particularly where children were not familiar with being asked their opinion.

Many of the Younger Cohort children were approaching the age of primary school enrolment, and the challenge was to find tools to understand children's readiness for school, as well as to measure educational achievement for both cohorts. The selection of tools had to find a balance between using validated, standardised psychometric tests necessary to contribute to debates on cognitive development, and

finding measures that could be applied in developing country contexts. After extensive piloting of several cognitive development and achievement tests, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) and a Cognitive Developmental Assessment (CDA) developed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement were selected to assess Younger Cohort children's verbal and quantitative abilities. In addition, the PPVT, two reading and writing items from Round 1, and a Mathematics Achievement Test were selected to assess Older Cohort children's verbal and quantitative abilities. All the tests were translated and back-translated for use in different countries.

As well as the development and selection of new tools, changes in content and structure were made in the Round 2 survey.

- A preliminary interview was introduced, partly to arrange the household interview but also to collect key pieces of information that were previously in the main household survey, thus reducing respondent burden.
- More detailed background information was sought on household members, including the highest level of education reached, and details of non-resident biological fathers.
- The livelihood section of the household survey was subdivided into five areas to better reflect the connection between livelihood strategies and asset structure. More indicators were included about who in the household makes decisions about key assets.
- A new section on food and non-food consumption and expenditure was introduced to the household survey to facilitate more extensive analysis of economic relationships, including measuring poverty using consumption-based welfare measures.
- The social capital section of the household survey was revised to include questions on how social relationships are formed, perceived and used, access and lack of access to services and information, and participation in collective action.
- The child health and development section of the household survey added considerable detail by asking for more information about long-term health problems and disabilities, immunisation, use of health services and dietary diversity.
- In the Older Cohort child component, sections were added to find out about parents and household issues, perceptions of wealth, the community and the future, and children's aspirations, feelings and attitudes, including investigation of discrimination, self-esteem and self-efficacy. A single section on school and activities included more detailed questions about time use.
- Caregiver mental health questions were replaced with questions on psychosocial well-being which closely reflected those posed to the Older Cohort children, partly to see whether the feelings and perspectives of caregivers influence the children they care for.
- The community context survey was restructured into three modules. The first collected updated information on community profiles from Round 1. The second collected detailed information on child-specific services, focusing on health, education and child protection. The third was an optional country-specific module.

- The socio-economic status section was maintained without changes. This section provides the data needed to construct wealth indices, which are the main instrument Young Lives uses to measure and compare the relative socio-economic status of the households [in the sample](#). Maintaining this section unchanged was essential to ensure longitudinal consistency.

Round 3: reinforcing the child focus

Carried out in 2009, when the children were around 8 and 15 years old, Round 3 was the first to include child survey items for the Younger Cohort children. The new Younger Cohort child protocol was heavily based on some sections of the Round 2 Older Cohort protocol, with core sections on school and work activities, feelings and attitudes and social networks, skills and support adapted to the interests and capacities of the age group. It also included a simple game designed to assess risk preference, in order to understand whether children who are willing to take risks have better outcomes than other children.

Several other completely new elements were also introduced.

- A self-administered questionnaire for the Older Cohort asked questions in areas that young people may have felt uncomfortable discussing in a face-to-face interview, such as psychological well-being, experiences of violence, intra-household issues, tobacco and alcohol consumption, and sexual and reproductive health.
- A section was added to the household survey to collect data about the health and nutrition of the closest-in-age siblings of Younger Cohort children, in order to better understand intra-household differences and dynamics. In addition, a receptive vocabulary test (PPVT) was administered to these siblings in Ethiopia, Peru, and Vietnam.
- Several new country-specific sections were added to the household component. In Ethiopia, these concerned access to, and perceptions of, credit support and social protection programmes. In India, they focused on a range of programmes aimed at girls, marginalised groups, rural employment and the abolition of child labour. In Peru, respondents were asked extra questions about access to key services and programmes, and children were given an eye test. In Vietnam, these elements concentrated on an education aid programme, health insurance and experiences of extra schooling.
- Round 3 coincided with the [first round of the school component](#), which provides detailed data about the schools attended by a sub-sample of the Young Lives children, expanding the scope for analysis of the impacts of education.

As in Round 2, alterations and amendments were also made to the core sections of the surveys.

- In response to hypothesised links between climate change and migration, and the considerable rates of migration by Young Lives children in Peru, India and Ethiopia, questions were added to the household and child questionnaires in order to better document children's mobility and the temporal character of their migrations.

- In response to feedback from fieldwork teams, the livelihoods section was made more concise. In place of questions on assets and earnings, a simple seed game developed and piloted by the Peruvian team was introduced in Round 3. Respondents listed all their income sources and then distributed 20 seeds across the list to provide an estimate of the relative importance of each. They were then asked in detail about the amount of income they obtain from the largest source, and this was used to estimate the value of other sources according to the distribution of the seeds.
- The social capital section of the household survey was shortened as, while the household was the main source of social capital for the children when they were young, its importance declines as they grow older and establish social networks independent of the household.
- Questions about fast food, physical activity and tobacco use were added to the health section of the household component, which also included a more comprehensive food security model in order to allow the calculation of a food security status for the whole household.
- Various adaptations and translations were made to increase the cultural relevance of PPVT tests.
- The Older Cohort child survey became more detailed to the extent that it was a challenge for researchers to keep the instrument short enough to apply. While more complex questions were asked in some core areas, other questions were dropped if Round 2 analysis showed high levels of non-response or non-applicable answers.
- The community context questionnaire was shortened to fit better with the rest of the Round 3 survey, gathering information on prices and service delivery, and completing and updating the inventory of schools, social protection and education programmes begun in Round 2.

Round 4: focusing on life-course changes

The fourth survey round, carried out in 2013/14 when the Young Lives children were about 12 and 19 years old, looked into maintaining a critical balance between preserving the longitudinal core elements of the questionnaire, keeping inter-cohort comparability for the 12 year olds (in relation to the Older Cohort in Round 2), and capturing new life situations of young adults, some of whom had formed new households, had children, or had completed full-time education. In addition, there was high analytical demand for re-interviewing the siblings of the younger children (initially interviewed in Round 3) which led to the creation of another panel element. Thus, in Round 4, each study country tracked and interviewed these children, which in many instances involved revisiting the households or travelling to other villages.

Changes made to the core sections of the questionnaire were:

- Several questions and sections previously asked in the household questionnaire (and asked to the main caregiver) were moved to the Older Cohort child questionnaire as 19 year olds were best placed to answer questions about their physical and socio-economic well-being and different activities.

- A tracking questionnaire, designed to document the process of finding households and children, was developed further in order to allow us to identify the 'relevant household'. This is the household that best reflects the socio-economic situation of the child and, thus, where the household questionnaire should be administered. This was a challenge in Round 4 given the different living arrangements in which Young Lives children, especially the 19 year olds, could be found.
- A 'mini-community questionnaire' was designed to get basic information about children who migrated to communities outside the existing ones, where we had collected information since Round 2. Each country adopted a different set of criteria for opening a mini-community questionnaire, for example, a minimum number of five children living in the same locality and a travelling distance of more than 8 km from an existing Young Lives community. The questionnaire was a shortened version of the context instruments.
- Mathematics, reading and comprehension tests were adapted to portray different levels of skill for different ages within each country. Different forms of the tests were piloted in urban and rural/private and public schools, and the best performing items were selected for final booklets administered with the child questionnaire.
- PPVT was adapted in India, Ethiopia, and Vietnam by selecting specific items that reflected increasing levels of vocabulary skills in each of the local languages.
- Siblings of the Younger Cohort children – first interviewed in Round 3 – were tracked and interviewed again in Round 4. Younger siblings were administered a sub-set of psychosocial questions, a cognitive test (PPVT in Ethiopia, Peru, and Vietnam, and mathematics in India), and simple anthropometric measurements (weight and height).
- The self-administered questionnaire was reduced drastically and administered only to 19 year olds in Ethiopia and India. Peru administered a more extensive version, but also only to the Older Cohort.

In response to contextual changes in research and policy and life-course changes faced by 12 and 19 year olds, the new elements added to the questionnaires in Round 4 were:

- A new test of cognitive skills was used in Ethiopia and Peru for Younger Cohort children and their siblings. This was a short, computer-based test of the children's executive functioning skills.
- A comprehensive employment module, which gives an overview of all the paid and unpaid activities that the young adult was involved in, was developed to be administered in the Older Cohort individual questionnaire. The module included labour force participation, detailed information about the main work activity and the acquisition of formal and informal training.
- Relationships, marriage and fertility information was also collected in a new section included in the Older Cohort individual questionnaire. This section included details on spouse/partner characteristics, as well as pre-marriage assets (in Ethiopia), and gifts at marriage (in Ethiopia and India). Older Cohort girls and boys were also asked

about fertility expectations and for the whole history of births if they had had children of their own.

- A new section on decision-making, consisting of a list of hypothetical decisions, and a self-evaluation of level of involvement of the Older Cohort child and other household members in the decision-making process of each one of them.
- Movement histories, which included detailed information of all movements outside the locality that lasted more than two months since the last round, were recorded for children of both cohorts (in the household questionnaire for the Younger Cohort and the child questionnaire for the Older Cohort). In addition, migration aspirations and preferences, and personal and financial links with the main caregiver of the child in Round 3 (in cases where the child was no longer living with this person), were recorded for the 19 year olds.

Round 5: focusing on life-course outcomes

Round 5 was carried out in 2016-17, when the two cohorts were 15 and 22 years old. While many of the fundamental design considerations remained the same, the round introduced new areas of questioning that reflected the new life situations of these young people. The survey design for the 15 year olds focused on keeping a balance with previous core sections to ensure comparability, covering key areas that were asked to 15 year olds in 2009, and adding new contextual and policy relevant sections for this critical age. The design for the 22 year olds, in turn, focused on selecting outcome-oriented instruments and others that would reflect their transition into the labour market.

Building on the structure of Round 4, the development of Round 5 involved the following changes to the core sections of the questionnaire:

- Sections related to the child's education, health, and movement history, previously asked in the household questionnaire for the Younger Cohort (usually to the main caregiver) were moved to the child questionnaire as 15 year olds were best placed to answer these questions.
- Cognitive achievement tests were adapted following extensive piloting in the four countries. Mathematics, reading comprehension, and receptive vocabulary (PPVT) tests were administered only to 15 year olds; discontinuing the administration of achievement tests to 22 year olds. Also, following the administration procedure in Round 4, siblings of Younger Cohort young people were tested in receptive vocabulary (in Ethiopia, Peru, and Vietnam), and mathematics (in India).
- Short self-administered questionnaires (SAQs) were introduced for Younger Cohort young people in Ethiopia, India, and Peru; the latter with a slightly more extensive version. The questionnaires consisted of similar questions asked to the Older Cohort at age 15, in 2009. With some small variations across countries, the SAQs included questions on access to contraception and knowledge on sexual and reproductive health. Ethiopia, India, and Peru also continued administering the SAQ to Older Cohort young people.

In addition, the Round 5 survey included new elements for both 15 and 22 year olds:

- To assess gender attitudes among adolescents and young adults, the survey included the Attitudes toward Women Scale for Adolescents (AWSA); a 12-item scale to which individuals are asked to respond on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The statements refer to the rights, freedoms, and roles of girls and boys in education, sports, dating, and families, and to adult roles in parenting and housework.
- A new section aimed at identifying different levels of difficulties in functioning in six core domains was included in both the Younger Cohort and Older Cohort individual questionnaires. The set of questions correspond to the Washington Group (WG) Short Set of questions which ask whether people have difficulties performing basic activities such as walking, seeing, hearing, self-caring, communicating, and learning/concentrating.
- A module on access, frequency of use, and level of skills in using digital devices and internet was developed for both 15 and 22 year olds. After careful piloting, it was determined that in Ethiopia and India, this module would include questions about access and frequency of use for the 15 year olds and that only 22 year olds would be further asked about their skills. In Peru and Vietnam, both 15 and 22 year olds were asked about all three domains.
- Building on an existing section on education and job expectations and aspirations, Round 5 also asked about expectations of future earnings (at the age of 25), in relation to different education scenarios, and in relation to the job that the individual expected to have in the future. As the age of Older Cohort individuals at Round 5 (around 22 years old) was too close to the benchmark age of the expectation questions, the administration of the existing module was discontinued for them in this survey round.

- Fifteen year olds were also asked about their perceptions of marriage and parenthood through an extensive section that covered questions on the ideal age at marriage, ideal number of children, ideal birth spacing, etc.

For the 22 year olds, the focus for Round 5 was on their transition to the labour market. The following sections were therefore developed for the individual questionnaire:

- Soft skills for the labour market in terms of leadership ability and cooperative teamwork were included as self-reported instruments. The selected measures are sub-scales of the Review of Personal Effectiveness with Locus of Control (ROPELOC) instrument created to measure individuals' abilities and beliefs. Specifically in the case of the selected sub-scales, their aim is to measure individuals' social abilities.
- Additional personality traits that predict achievement and well-being such as perseverance and self-control – measured by a short Grit Scale – and two sub-scales of the Big-Five Personality Test (i.e. conscientiousness and neuroticism) were included together with the socio-emotional scales (self-efficacy, self-esteem, etc.) included since Round 2.
- A short section on other relevant skills for the labour market, such as knowledge and fluency in different languages, as well as the ability to operate different types of vehicles and machinery.

Finally, given that many Older Cohort individuals have already had children, and that basic information was collected in Round 4, Round 5 included a module to continue collecting information on the development of these children, creating thus a new panel element. For them, and for children born to the 22 year olds in the period between Round 4 and Round 5, information on health (antenatal care, breast feeding, vaccinations, etc.) and education (attendance at nursery, crèche or pre-school) has been extensively collected in Round 5.

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Attawell, K. (2003) *International Longitudinal Research on Childhood Poverty: Practical Guidelines and Lessons Learned from Young Lives*, Working Paper 11, Oxford: Young Lives.

Boyden, J. and P. Dornan (2011) *Putting Children at the Centre of Poverty Debates*, Policy Brief 12, Oxford: Young Lives.

Johnston, J. (2008) *Methods, Tools and Instruments for Use with Children*, Technical Note 11, Oxford: Young Lives.

Justification documents for the Young Lives survey can be found at:

[Young Lives: an International Study of Childhood Poverty: Round 1, 2002](#)

[Young Lives: an International Study of Childhood Poverty: Round 2, 2006](#)

[Young Lives: an International Study of Childhood Poverty: Round 3, 2009](#)

[Young Lives: an International Study of Childhood Poverty: Round 4, 2013-2014](#)