

Influencing the design and methodology of other studies

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The strength and quality of the Young Lives study lies not just in its enormously rich collection of data but also in its innovative methodology. As part of its approach to impact, Young Lives' Theory of Change (2015) states as its intention 'that the methodological and partnership story of Young Lives is articulated and disseminated in ways and through networks that improve the design, cost-effectiveness and impact of future cohort studies in low- and middle-income countries'. This has been realised in a wide range of important studies worldwide whose design has been informed by Young Lives, providing clear evidence of the quality and robustness of our methods.

Young Lives is a key partner in UNICEF's Global Longitudinal Research Initiative (GLORI), an innovative resource which aims to identify how cohort studies can contribute to policy and research, identify gaps in knowledge and share lessons on the practice of longitudinal studies. Young Lives was involved in the initial DFID-funded GLORI planning meeting in late 2014 which created an outcome document and advocacy toolkit, and hosted a second meeting in 2015 co-funded with UNICEF, in order to maintain momentum for the network at a time of discussions around the Sustainable Development Goals. Through GLORI, Young Lives methods and best practice are having a direct influence on the design of the next generation of longitudinal cohort studies.

Young Lives has influenced the design of the Global Early Adolescent Study (GEAS), a major study of 10-14 year olds in 15 countries that aims to understand the factors in early adolescence that predispose young people to subsequent sexual health risks and conversely promote healthy sexuality, so as to provide the information needed to promote sexual and reproductive well-being. It is a partnership between the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, and research institutions in 15 countries around the world. Young Lives provided the GEAS team with information about our methodology, approach, survey design, and questionnaires, some of which has been integrated into the GEAS design and survey.

“The Young Lives programme has been both a guiding light and inspiration for the Global Early Adolescent Study. We have drawn on the expertise and lessons learned from Young Lives frequently and continue to do so. For example, we have patterned our ethical guidelines consistent with those of Young Lives. We have drawn on the context evaluation work that has been so important to Young Lives and have consulted with both the Young Lives economists and social scientists as we have planned our measures. We have learned immeasurably about approaches to longitudinal research with children and young adolescents; and we have looked for every opportunity to partner and collaborate as the Young Lives team fully understands that we are all beneficiaries of strong collaborations.”

Robert Wm. Blum, Professor, Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health, Director, Johns Hopkins Urban Health Institute, Johns Hopkins University

Young Lives has also had a significant influence on DFID's Research into Improving Systems of Education (RISE) programme, reflecting Young Lives' considerable expertise in research on school effectiveness. Young Lives has collaborated closely over how learning outcomes are measured in RISE; our methods have been integrated into the programme, and many of the study design elements in RISE build on Young Lives' design. This collaborative approach means that Young Lives has arguably provided the foundation for RISE, which would not otherwise have existed in its current form. It is also likely to have saved time and effort in terms of study design. Young Lives' 'organic model' of collaboration and engagement – designing its schools research with the people who are actually going to use the data – has influenced RISE too; as a result of our advice, RISE plans to set up in-country advisory/technical boards to ensure that the data they collect are relevant and useful to local partners.

Young Lives had an impact on the choice of study countries in RISE (Vietnam, India and Ethiopia are all included). Young Lives was the first study to demonstrate that educational outcomes in Vietnam at primary level are particularly high; we are examining why students are doing so well – reaching or even exceeding learning levels of students in developed countries. These findings are likely to have had a major impact on the choice to include an in-depth project on Vietnam, which will investigate further how the country has 'got it right' on learning. In Latin America, Young Lives has contributed to the design of an IADB/IDRC-funded project on youth and the labour market. This cross-country study is taking place in eight Latin American countries to investigate the transition to the labour market for young people aged 15-24. A number of Young Lives survey modules have been included, and a comparative study will be carried out using the data collected for the eight study countries plus Peru, using Young Lives data (Peru is not one of the eight countries).

Lessons from the design of Young Lives have been used in a cohort study run by the Family Studies Group at Universidad de la Republica in Uruguay in collaboration with other public bodies. The study, Encuesta de Salud, Nutricion y Desarrollo (Health, Nutrition and Development Survey – ENDIS), began in 2013. In August 2015, soon after the data from the first ENDIS wave were available, and recognising that it needed

to build capacity in the running of this type of study, the Family Studies Group organised a workshop to learn from international experiences on cohort studies, with a particular focus on children and teenagers. Santiago Cueto from Young Lives Peru was a key participant. The lessons from the workshop were crucial for planning the second wave of ENDIS, and the Young Lives Peru experience was acknowledged as being particularly useful for the design.

“ The set of outcomes assessed in the Young Lives study are very similar to the ones in ENDIS and we were able to learn about the difficulties involved in maintaining the different questions through time and how to combine questions that are relevant in all childhood stages, with those that are age specific and pose comparability problems, although they are relevant to capture each cohort. Other findings from the Young Lives research agenda, such as the recent improvements in health and nutritional outcomes in older children, were very relevant to set the future ENDIS research agenda for the second and further waves. ”

Wanda Cabella, Coordinator, Population Programme, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de la República, Uruguay

In Vietnam, Young Lives interacted closely with Plan International before the start of their three-year longitudinal study of nearly 300 Vietnamese children aged 3-5 (2015-18). This is an intervention study, looking at improving teaching

methodology for this age group, and raising awareness among parents. Plan International sought advice from Young Lives on the study's methodology, especially in relation to the need for control groups and the importance of not replacing children who drop out from the sample. The Young Lives Vietnam Data Manager has been asked to provide ongoing advice and support. Also in Vietnam, the World Bank-funded School Education Quality Assurance Program (SEQAP), run by the Ministry of Education and Training, approached Young Lives for advice on the application of EGRA (Early Grade Reading Assessment) in education surveys that formed part of the programme.

The British Academy (BA) and Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) have launched a pilot longitudinal cohort study in Tanzania, Pakistan and Bangladesh which makes substantial use of Young Lives methods. The study has an intervention component and aims to increase significantly understanding of child development and what can be done at different developmental stages to mitigate adverse environmental factors. Young Lives has provided expertise for the longitudinal cohort aspect, specifically on data collection in low- and middle-income settings. The BA/IFS study includes measures of multiple dimensions of child development at various stages, and has drawn on Young Lives experience in piloting and administering child development measures (including cognitive, executive functioning, and psycho-social).