

Creating a unique world class resource of multi-country longitudinal data

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One of the most significant impacts that Young Lives seeks to achieve is ‘the legacy of a mature and unique longitudinal dataset, which can continue to be mined, and provides important social science infrastructure for research, teaching and learning in low- and middle-income countries, and indeed globally’ (Theory of Change 2015). Young Lives is one of the few studies worldwide that combines children’s own perspectives on their lives with quantitative measures of wellbeing, time-use and cognition, together with information on their households and communities and the effectiveness of their schools. This gives it a strength and depth which makes it of great value to many other individuals and organisations with an interest in child poverty. The public archiving of Young Lives data makes them widely accessible. This year, our data have been used by organisations including the World Bank and UNICEF/UN in analyses that have had, or will have, influence on global policy.

Longitudinal cohort data yield a wealth of insights that cannot be generated through shorter-term or single-focus research. In high-income countries cohort data have become established as an essential part of informing change and improving policy and practice (for example, the UK’s CLOSER initiative). In low- and middle-income countries, however, far fewer studies are carried out, especially with children, making Young Lives a particularly important resource.

The exceptional quality, strength and uniqueness of the Young Lives study can be evidenced in many ways. It is the only longitudinal cohort study comparable across countries, and the only one that uses diverse qualitative methods as well as quantitative measures. It gathers multi-dimensional information about communities, households, caregivers, schools, siblings and children’s peers, as well as about the individual children themselves. This means that it is capable of identifying the determinants of children’s outcomes at many different levels, and providing a holistic view of child development in contexts of extreme risk and adversity.

Being a two-cohort study, it enables comparisons and measurements of improvement or deterioration to be made across the cohorts (such as educational performance at a given age). In addition, Young Lives is beginning to collect data on a new generation of babies (the children of the older cohort); this is creating new intergenerational evidence to add to that already obtained through study of caregivers and Young Lives children. Another unique feature of Young Lives research is the surveys gathering data on school effectiveness, which are entering their second round; no other study in low- and middle-income countries brings together child, household and school data in this way.

Young Lives data are routinely used by major global institutions. This year, Young Lives Peru data were used in the World Bank report ‘Left Behind: Chronic Poverty in Latin America’ (2016) to provide insights into intergenerational poverty that would have been difficult to obtain through other non-longitudinal research. Other Young Lives data have

been used by the World Bank in preparation of two major forthcoming reports: the World Development Report 2018, and its report on ECD and Skills Formation 2017. Peru data were also used in the CAF (Development Bank of Latin America) RED Report 2016 on skills for work and life. Young Lives data from Vietnam were used extensively in the preparation of the OECD’s Development Centre *Social Cohesion Policy Review of Viet Nam* (2014) and the World Bank’s report *Skilling up Vietnam: Preparing the workforce for a modern market economy* (2014).

Researchers from across the world have actively sought to collaborate on the Young Lives study. The calibre of collaborators is extremely high, with respected academics from many different disciplines wanting to do joint research or use Young Lives data. Examples include Professor Paul Glewwe, Professor Jere Behrman, Professor Pauline Rose, Professor Aryeh Stein and Professor Orazio Attanasio. The ability to attract and retain high-level collaborators significantly increases the reach and influence of Young Lives research.

“The Young Lives data, with rich comparable longitudinal information across four developing countries on individual children, their families and the communities in which they live, is unique ... The many strengths of the Young Lives data include a prospective design with longitudinal follow ups, extensive multi-dimensional data, rich community information that permit investigating causal relations, low attrition rates and the use of common instruments and research methods in Asia, Africa and Latin America.”

Professor Jere Behrman, University of Pennsylvania

Young Lives data have generated high-impact journal publications this year in, for example, *Social Science and Medicine*, *Journal of Nutrition*, *Public Health Nutrition*, *Economics and Human Biology* and *International Journal of Behavioural Development*. In May 2016 *The Lancet* published a major new commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing, which contains analysis from three Young Lives countries.

Young Lives' quantitative data are publicly archived via the UK Data Service (UKDS), and are internationally accessible. Public archiving is not common, especially in low- and middle-income countries. The dataset is vast, with a total of around 25 million data points collected in each survey round. There is little missing data, and few children drop out of the study, especially compared to studies in high-income countries, making this a high quality source. Young Lives also produces other resources, including fieldworker manuals and technical notes, and panel data of key variables across all survey rounds. This additional information widens access and use of the data.

Round 4 survey data were archived in March 2016. UKDS downloads have increased dramatically over the past year, from just over 2,500 at 31 March 2016 to over 4,000 at 15 March 2017. This reflects our expectation that there would be significantly more downloads once Round 4 data had increased the power of the longitudinal data. In addition to the public archive, Young Lives makes considerable efforts to help people actually use the data, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Data are released on CD-ROM to facilitate use by those who do not have internet access. Young Lives country teams distribute the data directly to local researchers and also run training sessions on how to use the data and to increase data usage in the study countries. The Peru team is most active in this respect; last year over 100 students, academics, governmental and NGO staff were trained in the use of Young Lives data in Peru.

The World Bank's online Microdata Library has links to the Young Lives data archive, which facilitates access and also demonstrates that the World Bank regards the data as being of sufficiently high quality to recommend to others. Young Lives is in the process of signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the World Bank to archive all study data in their internal

data repository for World Bank use, again reflecting the value they place on the data.

“One of the most difficult tasks we have as researchers in development is to understand welfare dynamics. Our simple cross sectional data simply is not up for the task. Young Lives is one of those projects that has really facilitated breaking the data gaps. The unique ability to follow up children across different settings and over their childhoods has provided us with a rare glimpse of life trajectories and new insights about both the economic, social and psychological factors that go into play in the process of development and early childhood. One example that has struck me as extremely useful is from our work for our Chronic Poverty book in Latin America. The Young Lives data from Peru allowed us to better document the low intra-generational mobility not only in the education space but also in aspirations. That opens up a whole new agenda for us to seriously think how to break the intra-generational transmission of poverty. Looking forward to seeing more insights coming out of this project.”

Renos Vakis, Lead Economist, Head – Behavioral Initiatives
Poverty and Equity Global Practice & LSMS Team, World Bank

“While doing research on inequality of opportunity at the World Bank, I had the chance of working with the Young Lives data. The possibility of having an understanding of the role of individual, family and community circumstances, and the panel features, provide opportunities to test hypotheses that are not possible in other designs ... There are only few projects that have made the initial investment needed to build a real panel with the wealth of information that Young Lives provides.”

Jaime Saavedra-Chanduvi, then Director of Poverty Reduction and Equity Department at the World Bank (subsequently Minister of Education in Peru) (Annual Report 2015/16)