

Reflective piece: ethical and methodological lessons learnt in carrying out qualitative research with adolescents in times of crisis

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Since the beginning of the pandemic, the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti has developed an international collaboration with other UNICEF offices, research partners and academia, to carry out several qualitative studies to explore children's and young people's experiences and perceptions of the COVID-19 crisis, as well as their recommendations for future management of similar crises around the world. The multi-country project is currently carried out in Angola, Canada, Chile, Indonesia, Italy, Lesotho and Madagascar. To carry out the project in a collaborative way, the Office of Research has developed a methodological approach and tools for data collection; these have then been adapted to the various country contexts, considering cultural specificities and pandemic curves. The country projects are at different stages of completion and each took an individual trajectory.

This research piece has a twofold objective: (i) to document and assess the processes of conducting a qualitative study about adolescents' experiences and recommendations on the pandemic, and (ii) to capture lessons about how to effectively manage child- and youth- centered research in crisis periods/contexts. The reflective piece aims at answering the following key research questions:

- How were the project principles (open, participative, inclusive, collaborative, high quality) applied in practice? In what ways was children's agency respected throughout the project?
- How were the research methods adapted and used across countries? How effective were the research tools in capturing children's and young people's experiences? Were some more effective with particular groups of children (eg. age, gender, background, etc.)?
- How was the data collected – in-person or remotely? How was the approach adapted to the crisis context? What are the key lessons/challenges in gathering data (eg. logistical, building rapport etc.)?
- What were ethical challenges in interacting with children and young people? How did these balance with respect to their safety and protection vis-à-vis their interest in participating? Is children's and young people's participation in research meaningfully recognized?

The analysis is carried out as After Action Reviews to document the process and facilitate reflection about the research experience and 'what worked well'. It will involve group and/or individual discussions with country teams to tease out lessons in specific contexts, as well as reviews of projects documents, including ethical submissions, researchers' diaries and documentation, and reports.

The methodological brief will reflect specifically on the value of a range of methodologies and interview techniques used, on the strength and weaknesses of conducting qualitative research online versus in presence, on ethical challenges related to procedural and relational aspects, on the involvement of children and young people in research and dissemination. The reflective piece will provide an overview of lessons learnt and good practices in conducting in-depth research with children and young people in times of crisis and across high-, medium- and low- income countries. The work is in progress since many of the studies to be included in the analysis have not completed their activities yet.

The final output will be used as a toolkit to reflect on how to meaningfully involve children and young people in qualitative research built to inform policy and programming.