

Transcript

00:00:00 Julia

You're listening to a podcast from Young lives, a longitudinal study of poverty and inequality following the lives of 12,000 children into adulthood in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam since 2002.

00:00:14 Julia

We've just completed the seventh round of our long running survey and this episode is the first of a series in which we go behind the scenes and hear about the innovative research methods the team has used to gather quality data ethically and sensitively.

00:00:29 Julia

So I'm delighted to be joined today by a researcher from our team, Sophie von Rusdorf, whose here to talk about her new research on how to measure young people's experiences of violent conflict in Ethiopia. Sophie, welcome.

00:00:43 Sophie

Thanks, Julia.

00:00:44 Julia

Can you start by telling us what it is that you set out to do with this piece of research.

00:00:49 Sophie

Of course I wrote this paper together with a group of researchers from Young Lives, Marta Favara, Laura Ahlborn, Alessandra Hidalgo and Gerry McQuade.

00:00:57 Sophie

We wanted to explore how to best interview Young lives participants who have been exposed to violent or traumatic situations, especially in Ethiopia. That is because since November 2020, the young people whom we follow in study in Ethiopia, particularly those living in the Tigray and Amhara regions, have been affected by armed conflict.

00:01:17 Sophie

Including experiences of physical or sexual violence, lack of food and economic hardship.

00:01:23 Sophie

But gathering quality data during or just after conflicts can be quite challenging. That is because we are asking questions about potentially very sensitive or traumatic experiences, and when we ask the respondents to recount those experiences, this can risk re-traumatising them. So there are very clear ethical concerns about how to safeguard the well-being of our survey respondents.

00:01:46 Sophie

And also that of the field workers conducting the interview as they may be at risk of developing secondary trauma.

00:01:53 Sophie

And from a data quality point of view, the respondents may feel ashamed or afraid to talk about their experiences in a traditional face to face interview. Or they may be worried about that someone else might overhear their answers.

00:02:08 Sophie

So, in the end, they may choose not to respond to our questions at all, or be reluctant to share distressing experiences that they may have had, and what that means for us as researchers is that we might then underestimate the extent to which individuals and communities have been affected by violent conflict

00:02:24 Sophie

So our research wanted to look into which survey method would work best in a post conflict setting with mixed literacy levels.

00:02:34 Sophie

Where we can ensure a high -quality data collection while also prioritising our duty of care.

00:02:39 Julia

Thanks so much. And can you tell us a little bit now about how you designed your research?

00:02:43 Sophie

In 2023, I travelled to Ethiopia and worked with the young lives Ethiopia team to run a pilot study where we interviewed a small group of young people that live in similar circumstances to those we follow in our study and also have similar background characters.

00:02:59 Sophie

We then randomly assign them to one of two groups. One was to answer questions about their exposure to violent conflict using a method called audio computer assisted self-interviewing or Acasi, and the other group was to answer the exact same questions in a face to face interview. In a face to face interview, the respondent is asked questions by an interviewer in a conversational setting, so quite similar to what we are doing right now.

00:03:26 Sophie

But with Acasi, the respondent is answering questions in private on a pre-programmed tablet without the involvement of an interviewer. They do that by using headphones to listen to prerecorded, simple yes and no questions, and then respond by touching coloured shapes on the tablet screen that represent their yes or no answers.

00:03:48 Sophie

This is meant to increase the privacy and confidentiality of their answers, so hopefully making their respondents feel more comfortable and limiting the impact that the survey process has on their well-being. And in the paper we then compared the answers that we obtained as part of the face to face interview with those that we got from the group that used the Acasi method.

00:04:08 Julia

Thank you very much for explaining that. And can you tell us now what you found out?

00:04:13 Sophie

So we found out that we were able to learn more about young people's experiences when we used the Acasi method. So in other words, Acasi led to a higher disclosure rate.

00:04:25 Sophie

Our respondents shared more experiences about violent conflict in total, and they were also more likely to report any experience at all when they were using the Acasi method compared to the group where these questions were asked in a face to face interview. We also found that this effect was especially pronounced for the most sensitive questions.

00:04:45 Sophie

So when the respondent or a close family member or friend was the victim, or when the trauma suffered was more severe or violent.

00:04:52 Julia

So you found out some very important things from your research. And can you tell us what your conclusions are from what you've done?

00:05:00 Sophie

Our overall conclusion was that Acasi is a really useful methodology when someone is interested in measuring experiences of violent conflict, it can give us a more accurate picture of the prevalence of violence and at the same time prioritise duty of care and the well-being of vulnerable respondents. Acasi is especially relevant in low literacy settings.

00:05:22 Sophie

As it doesn't require people to read, write or type answers because it is using audio instead.

00:05:28 Sophie

However, Acasi also has some important limitations that researchers need to keep in mind. First of all, since we are recording the questions, this can be costly and time consuming.

00:05:39 Sophie

And also, since the respondent is using a tablet by themselves without assistance from an interviewer, they need to have a certain level of digital literacy. In our case, we were able to confirm that our respondents were comfortable using tablets, but obviously technical literacy is still a concern in general.

00:05:57 Sophie

And lastly, the number of questions and that complexity should be limited to make sure that Acasi really is accessible for all respondents.

00:06:05 Julia

Thank you. And it's this was a pilot study as you explained at the start. Can you just tell us how you've used the results of this pilot so far?

00:06:14 Sophie

So based on the results of this paper, the Young Lives Research team then decided to implement the Acasi method for our whole sample in Ethiopia regarding their experience of conflict in our round seven survey, which we completed in May 2024.

00:06:29 Sophie

And we are now beginning to analyse this data that we collected using Acasi to better understand the impact that this conflict has had on the young people in our survey and we are hoping that this is the sort of information that can help ensure that support is directed to where it is needed the most.

00:06:47 Julia

Thank you so much Sophie for sharing this innovative work and good luck with the next steps. Can I just ask if people listening want to find out more, hat should they do?

00:06:57 Sophie

They should visit the Young Lives website. For example, we have also written a blog about our paper that goes into a bit more detail and that will be published on the Young Lives website and also the research paper has been published in Economics letters.

00:07:11 Julia

Thank you. And don't forget that you can always follow Young lives news on our social media channels X, LinkedIn and Facebook. And as Sophie mentioned, our website www.younglives.org.uk.

So thank you again, Sophie, and thank you for listening.