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Final Version

Street children as researchers: critical reflections on a participatory methodological process in the Growing up on the Streets research in Africa

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Abstract

This chapter explores the development of participatory research with street children and considers how to ensure that their voices are properly represented in research. Through an initial discussion of the emergence of children as active agents, the chapter explores the impact of including children more readily in research for street children. Their particular position offers a unique insight into children's lives, simply because of their more independent status, yet their position has also made it harder for researchers to access their lives. The importance of participation as a central methodological process is discussed before focusing on a new research initiative that seeks to challenge research boundaries by employing street children as researchers and experts on their own lives. The remainder of the paper introduces the Growing up on the Streets research and critically explores some of the practical and ethical challenges this process has presented. The chapter concludes by urging others to work more in partnership with young people, who may be excluded from traditional forms of research, adapting techniques to facilitate the greater involvement of street children and other marginalised young people, in expressing their views and representing themselves through their own stories in research arenas.

Keywords: street children; young researchers; participation; ethics; agency; Africa

Introduction

Children's Geographies has very much been at the forefront of critically analysing the way in which academics, and particularly social scientists, undertake research. The debate about children's agency and childhood as a social construction in the 1980s and 1990s (and beyond) holds significance for the ways in which we not only conceptualise childhood, but how children are treated in the research process. The difficulties of reconciling notions of competency, agency and the expert status of children as active agents shaping their own lives, with structural process of parenting, education and general adult-child power relations has opened up significant debate.

The explosion of research undertaken with children since the 1990s and the emergence of the New Social Studies of Childhood (NSSC) at that time (James et al, 1998) resulted in discussion regarding how such research should be undertaken. The inclusion of children as active agents in their own lives, as a key principle of the NSSC, meant that it was no longer considered appropriate to only interview adults on children's behalf, as this was effectively excluding children from telling their own stories. The principle of 'agency' outlined in the NSSC translated into the inclusion of children as active agents in the research process. This process of now including children in research about their lives opened up significant debate about the type of methods that should be used and the process by which they should be implemented. Notwithstanding the constraints placed on children by adult structures defined by society and their relative subordinate position to adults (Mayall, 2012), researchers were now thinking critically about how to include children's voices in the research process. Interesting innovative approaches to 'doing research differently' with children emerged that involved greater

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creativity, less technical writing and reading skills and opportunities for more interaction between participants and researchers. The positioning of such methods was that they should be fun, take any pressure away from children regarding getting the 'answers' right and facilitate their open engagement. Sam Punch (2002), among others, moved the discussion on in the 2000s by critiquing the use of methods that are specifically designed for children suggesting that it is not the method per se that needs adapting but rather the process of engagement. There has been a consistent move towards participatory research that gives 'voice' to young people (for example, Blazek and Hanrova, 2012; Holt, 2004); considering their emotions (Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Hadfield-Hill and Horton, 2014); and offering opportunities for empowerment and activism (Cahill, 2004; Haynes and Tanner, 2013). This participatory approach has roots within development studies through participatory rural appraisal (PAR) (Chambers, 1984) and Education with Paulo Friere's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which states that the oppressed (marginalised) must take responsibility for themselves as active participants (Friere, 1972). Yet, the power of participation has gained significant momentum within Children's Geographies and, as such, these approaches are becoming more widespread and no longer simply seen as innovative but rather an important element in research with children.

This chapter explores these debates with respect to researching street children. The particular nature of street life, the complexities it pervades and difficulties it presents for research highlight not only the importance of getting the research process right when working with children but demonstrates that researchers have more to learn. The following section outlines the emergence of methodologies for research with street children, which has followed similar lines of as that of Children's Geographies but highlights the special circumstances and difficulties that arise and how they have been reconciled, and highlight what changes to methodological process are still needed. The chapter then moves on to introduce the 'Growing up on the Streets' research project which attempts to overcome some of the remaining difficulties and challenges of developing an evidence-base that speaks of the street from children's perspectives and using their voices.

Researching with street children as researchers

Street children, as perhaps one of the most visible signs of poverty and marginalisation, are a key group to consider in thinking through researching with children because their more (often) independent status forces researchers to think critically about the process of involving them in research. Further, the complexity of their lives often highlights significant issues that make research difficult. In the 1980s Judith Ennew was at the forefront of campaigning for better research to understand the lived realities of (street) children's lives and insisted that research be *with* not *on* children (Beazley et al 2014). In particular Ennew advocated for children's rights to be properly considered in research that brings together discussion of ethics and methods and methodology in a reflective process (Abebe and Bessell, 2014; Beazley et al, 2009). This is particularly important for research with street children, because despite significant interventions and policy changes around children's rights at both national and international levels, across the world, street children are consistently failed in terms of being able to access their rights (Poretti et al 2014). For example, The United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 16/12 was the first on street children for over 20 years and was important because despite the emergence of children's rights policies across many African countries in the 1990s, fuelled by the momentum behind the popularity of international standards and policies such as the CRC, street children seemed to have fallen through the net. Much of the international legislation was derived from western conceptualisations of childhood which prioritised protection of childhood innocence and placed children firmly within a family context. Street children, who often fell outside this understanding of the ideal childhood, were considered out of

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place on the streets, and unable to access their rights. Therefore there is a need to confront the labels given to street children.

The problematic nature of research with street children

An inability to adequately define, and therefore understand, who street children are has placed them outside the arena of policy development for two reasons. Their lack of formal representation as a group makes them difficult to fit into targets and measures of success while their independent status places them outside recognised channels of protection – by adults (Poretti et al 2014; van Blerk 2014). This presents a significant difficulty in developing research with street children, particularly in relation to gaining consent and accessing guardianship permission for their voices to be heard. The idea of children in the street as being 'out of place' (Connolly and Ennew, 1996) and lacking agency because of their age (Bordano, 2012), is far from new and has been widely critiqued, yet it still severely constrains the range of potential responses to the needs of street children to actions that are consistent with a child protection agenda.

While young people's safety should of course be a primary consideration, service provision tends to be geared towards countable outputs and, in our experience, funding is often based on particular global models of ideal childhood that position street children as 'other' (Ennew and Swart-Kruger, 2003). Further, there is a lack of clear evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of the current provision of such services and more needs to be done in this regard (Thomas de Benitez, 2011), while the tailoring of provision directly to the needs of young people requires their involvement in the design process. The ideal of a nuclear family unit overwhelms service design driving delivery towards those young people that offer the possibility of being returned to family environments. While this can be a very positive step where fractured family relationships can be repaired, it can only ever benefit some children on the street (van Blerk, 2012). Research to date highlights that street children have often run away from abuse, been orphaned, or sent to the city due to poverty in the family household. However, poverty might be a necessary condition for children being on the streets but it not the only condition (Aptekar and Stoecklin, 2014). Further, many children are connected to their families while on the streets; some live part-time on the street working or begging to supplement family income; others move between the street and their home communities to avoid becoming drawn into criminal or drug-related gangs and others still are part of extended families that live permanently on streets or in informal settlements and are therefore in that sense already at 'home' (Beazley, 2002; Young 2003; van Blerk 2012).

The impact of the complexity of family and social relationships on policy and practice is further increased by the discursive applications of 'street' which is used both to describe the physical thoroughfare but also symbolically to denote an arena, and by extension a person, that is outside of society and without formal connection. Therefore the problematic nature of the term 'street children' is acknowledged: it locates children in the street (Hecht, 1998), which is static, excluding the capacity of children to move between different social and spatial environments (Lucchini, 1996) and it associates the negative characteristics of street environments to childhood (Conticini, 2004). This has particular importance for research into the lives of street children as it underpins a simplistic binary where 'on' the street represents danger and a departure from normative social behaviours and 'off' the street is indicative of problems resolved and *counted* as a legitimate output from a service

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intervention. This approach emphasises the 'street' over 'children'. Therefore the labels of childhood and street contribute to how street children are conceptualised and frame the design of 'legitimate' actions eligible for public and donor funding. For research it is important to confront how life on the street is conceived and to create an evidence base to inform debate and overcome the hardened boundaries of what is an appropriate service intervention with children and young people living or working on the streets.

These labels have impacted research with street children also. Too much attention has, and to some extent still is, focused on the need to count street children, identifying their numbers and characteristics (Thomas de Benitez, 2011). Although this may be an essential part of understanding who is on the streets, it has, rather unhelpfully, diverted attention away from the realities of street children's lives: objectifying them rather than respecting them on the streets. Further, figures can be dubious because of this lack of clear definition of the 'street children' label, and who is included in the figures varies extensively. For instance, as the definition shifts slightly and moves between street children, working children, to homeless children and/or abandoned children this may result in some estimates focusing only on homeless children and others including those at risk of being on the streets. In addition, depending on who is doing the counting, the numbers can be exaggerated to increase feelings of insecurity and justify cleaning up the streets or underestimated to preserve the image of a humane (and prosperous) country (Aptekar and Stoeklin, 2014). Yet to research with street children effectively it is also essential to collect data regarding their diverse experiences on their streets and to understand these experiences in relation to age, gender and other defining characteristics. Collecting quantitative data must always be supplemented, and indeed as some would argue, preceded by in-depth qualitative research (Boyden and Ennew, 1997). Understanding children's experiences of the streets can have critical implications for policy regarding current and future well-being, and how best to protect their rights, particularly where they have been violated through the negative outcomes of street life.

In order to ensure we protect the rights of children living and/or working on the streets through the means by which data collection is undertaken with them, it is necessary to consider the special circumstances that many such young people are faced with. Sibley's (1991) statement that "appropriate research strategies, in both methodological and ethical senses need to be through very carefully" (p. 270), is especially pertinent for street children. This means that because children are active participants throughout the research process and their agency recognised, we should not overlook the complex ways in which their lives are shaped by events and situations beyond their control (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). The numerous ways in which street life affects children's abilities to engage in particular types of data collection should be carefully considered. Rather than suggesting that we select methods for data collection that are 'special methods for children', the aim here is to tailor methods that could be used for anyone (Punch, 2002), but that are adapted to the particular needs and abilities of street children.

As already noted, street children's lives are complex and varied and it is essential to note that children's right to have their voice heard provides us with an obligation to ensure the data collection process enables them express their views and experiences. For instance, factors such as drug use, which can reduce attention span and focus, may exclude certain methods that require long periods of concentration, while illiteracy or poor literacy and numeracy levels may make other forms of written data collection more difficult. In addition, negative relationships with authority figures; lack of trust of unfamiliar adults may make some methods such as one-to-one interviews intimidating. Hunger, lack of sleep, lack of available time, loss of earnings, and mobility are also issues, which require careful

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integration into the ways in which street-connected children engage in data collection. The timing and placing of data collection must therefore be on their terms. This may involve working at a variety of times and places in order to suit the needs of children, their daily work patterns and levels of mobility. For instance some children may spend time in different towns or parts of the city on different days and this should be accounted for, so as not to exclude them. Further, gender is an important consideration particularly where girls may find that they are severely restricted in their freedom to spend time engaged in research. However remembering the context of street children's situation and the relationships they are part of can be helpful in negotiating time to participate in data collection when it is convenient for all parties.

A recent research mapping exercise undertaken by the Consortium for Street Children identifies that there are still significant gaps in knowledge around street children's lives and more in-depth qualitative research is required (Thomas de Benitez, 2011). Employing a participatory approach to research with street children becomes crucial in order to ensure children's rights are respected in the process. More often 'experts' have carried out research from a programmatic, policy or academic perspective: yet this cannot replace the voices of street young people themselves. Mark Connolly's (1990) sentiment is worth reinforcing here in relation to children living and/or working on the streets where he positions them as experts on their own lives highlighting that they alone know their concerns and imagined future life paths.

In general, participatory research entails researching *with* people, rather than extracting data *from* them and treats them not as objects but active agents in their own lives (Beazley and Ennew 2006, Cahill 2004). This includes using a critical qualitative approach, which at best aims to increase participants awareness of their circumstances to effect change in their lives and transform the world through action and reflection (Pain and Francis, 2003; Freire, 1970). Participatory research is therefore a process involving commitment to ongoing information-sharing, dialogue, trust, reflection and action whereby participants lead and control the process from initiating research questions and aims through to analysis and presentation (O'Kane 2004). In practice, levels of participation vary greatly and the deepest levels of participation are rarely actualised. Hart's (1997) 'ladder of participation' describes a spectrum of ways of involving young people, and although the most basic may be tokenistic and even exploitative, participation at the highest level is not always considered universally desirable. Indeed, participants might not desire full participation; hence it is most appropriate to work with children on their own terms (Kindon et al 2007). However, engaging in data collection without significant discussion with street children of all aspects of the research process (aims, methods, level of involvement, dissemination etc) has been widely criticised and must be avoided (Boyden and Ennew, 1997). Therefore data collection needs to be considered holistically, both over the entire process of research and also over street children's whole lives. In offering suggestions for improving the ways data is collected, this chapter contends that the unique and special circumstances of street children need to be considered and built into the data collection process. However, this should not be the end of involvement and it is important to consider how children living and/or working on the streets can and should participate in the dissemination of research regarding their lives and how researchers, policy-makers and practitioners, have an ethical responsibility to ensure that no harm, and indeed, some potential for empowerment, is achieved through the voicing of their experiences.

The street researcher approach (see van Blerk 2013 and following Bemak, 1996 and Friere, 1972) has been heavily drawn upon to ensure participation (see for example, van Blerk 2012 and Blazek, 2011) facilitating street children to be engaged throughout the research process, one which is reflexive, enabling a dynamic approach to research, and is sensitive to changing conditions (Barker and Smith,

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2001). The unique situation of the streets demands such adaptability when researching with street children (Ennew, 2001; Young and Barrett, 2001a). The 'street researcher' concept re-defines the role of researchers reconceptualising them as 'street researchers' in order that they may equip themselves with the required skills and abilities for engaging with street children. This involves intense ethnography where the street researcher, realising that s/he is a novice in street life, learns the rules and norms of street life by relying on street children for cultural interpretation while developing trust, rapport and new ways of communicating through active engagement with street children on their terms and in their territory. Ennew (2001), Hecht (1998) and Swart (1990) also used aspects of this street researcher approach successfully, finding that it increased children's involvement and interest in their research. Further, street researchers need to be sensitive to the temporal and spatial aspects of the street where research activities must be fluid taking place during the day or at night and in marginal locations where street children are comfortable such as parks or vacant land (Young and Barrett, 2001b; Young, 2003). Within this street researcher participatory approach research with street children has more recently been associated with particular methods such as visual methods where produced images become the focus for discussion and collective analysis. However, it is not the methods themselves that make the research participatory, but rather the way data is produced through the social relations that take place between participants and researchers both in the data production and analysis. Those researching with street children advocate participatory approaches, for both ethical and practical reasons. Participatory techniques are understood to shift power relations, giving children greater control over their involvement in the research. Moreover, children's insights into their own lives are said to be most readily expressed when they are facilitated through self-directed methods (Young and Barrett 2001a). Different children prefer or require different methods (Punch 2002) so a multi-method approach enables most to contribute (Morrow 2008), and seeks to include the experiences of the hardest to reach groups, usually those whose rights have been violated the most. Participatory research is also likely to retain children's interests, enhancing the richness of the information they provide.

Although widely used and a highly effective means for engaging street children in research enabling their voices to come to the fore, this perspective still relies on researcher engagement in the field, which can only ever be temporary; gathering evidence as a snap shot in time or from defined periods in a sequence. Therefore there remain unanswered questions regarding what it means to grow up on the streets, and how to explore this longitudinally for impacting adult futures. The model of participation put forward by Hart (1997) highlights a series of stages on a ladder but rarely do young people participate as researchers doing the research themselves. Participation has mainly been in a collaborative form although some new examples of children as researchers are emerging in major studies (Porter et al., 2010) and research centres such as the Child Research Centre at the Open University (Kellet, 2011). Further, if young people on the streets are considered to be the experts on their own lives, then the most effective research has to be undertaken by street children themselves. The 'Growing up on the Streets' research therefore challenges boundaries in research with street children by taking a longitudinal perspective to street life and by employing street children as researchers, doing their own research.

Growing up on the streets: the research

There is little data regarding street children's experiences over the life course and if data is to be used to effectively support children living and/or working on the streets, the data collection process cannot be confined to fleeting moments. Much can be gained from understanding what happens to street






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children as they grow up, and how their needs change, as well as understanding how early childhood experiences impact on street connectedness and the ways in which prevention strategies can be better implemented. Exploring street life in its entirety, examining the ages and stages of children could enrich understanding of the process of street life and its impact on adulthood.

The Growing up on the Streets research explores the lives of young people living on the streets in three diverse African cities: Accra, Ghana; Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo and Harare, Zimbabwe. This is a collaborative longitudinal research project emerged as a response to unanswered questions regarding what happens to children who never leave the street. The aim of the research is to understand street children and youth’s capabilities on the street and to seek better ways of supporting them to have adult lives of value. To make the lives of street children knowable the research draws on the work of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum on the ‘capability approach’ enabling the research to see beyond the manifestations of poverty and life on the street to those aspects of life that the young people most have reason to value (Sen, 1999; Nausbaum, 2000). The approach has been tailored for street children, to explore the conditions that enable and constrain choice, and the freedoms they have to create a life they value (Shand, 2014). Through participatory engagement with young people from the selected cities; 10 capability statements were identified that reflected those aspects of life most important to the young people as they struggle to build adult lives (see figure 1). However, the capabilities identified by the participants do not represent individual and isolated aspects of life but are interwoven with each other. For example, preservation of health is affected by the availability of shelter; access to food is dependent on economic activity; and the ability to imagine and plan for the future is conditioned by the resilience in dealing with day to day problems. This already identifies the complex and relational nature of street life.

Further, taking a relational perspective to children’s street experiences is important as they interact with, and engage in social relations with a variety of actors in their lives. Therefore the data collection process regarding experiences of the street must not consider children in isolation. Even when seeking their views is the priority, we need to remember that they are integral to families, communities and nations. They are not simply divorced from contact with adults and peers. An approach that takes this into account will try to understand street connectedness more holistically. There is currently little research that integrates children’s actual experiences with the relational and contextual background to these experiences. Data collection that seeks to promote and protect children’s rights must explore who are the significant others in their relationship network and how they interact with them. This must also include those working at policy and practical levels to ensure that children’s needs are being appropriately addressed.

Figure1 – list the capabilities (with some of the accompanying visual representations).

	• Through my work I can build assets for my future.
	• I frequently receive the support of friends.
	• I am able to realise my plans for the future.
	• I am resilient in the face of problems that affect me.
	

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- I usually have enough to eat.
- I am able to behave in ways that protect my health and wellbeing.
- I am able to earn enough money to meet my basic needs.
- I am able to move freely and be safe in my local area.
- I have enough time to play.
- I have access to shelter.

Methodology: involving young people as researchers

The project is constructed around the participation of young people who are both investigators and informants in the research, working with researchers to determine the most appropriate outcomes. The principle of participation is central to the whole process and the high level of participation in this project is particularly innovative for work with street children. In order to create breadth to the research 66 street children (aged between 12 and 24 during the time of the research) and youth in each city (including the 6 researchers) were invited to take part in the research, totalling 198 participants. Each research assistant works with a group of ten young people from their own networks. They are supported in the process by the locally-based project managers, who engage with the wider research team and an African peer network, made up of service providers, who offer support and advice to the project.

The research assistants (aged between 16 and 20 at the start of the process) were invited to opt in to the research through open information sessions on the research. This was followed by a period of intense training. Unlike employing researchers who have trained extensively in research skills through University education, there is an imperative to adequately equip young people with the technical tools they need to action the research and gather data. This would equally be the case if researchers were using new techniques or strategies. The method therefore began with specific training that sought to introduce street children to research. Although some had come across research before, they had never been invited to actually undertake research so the purpose of these initial sessions was to ensure that those who opted-in, were fully cognisant with the objectives and requirements. Following this introduction, some chose not to continue while others were unable to fully complete the training due to other on-going commitments. They remain in the research as part of the networks. Very few dropped out completely at this stage. A second further set of ethnographic training workshops then took place with the remaining young people in each country. These training workshops equipped the young people with research skills based on the core principles of observation, questioning and listening. Some of the young people coined the term ‘active listening’ for their new research skills, preferring this to the more academic term ‘ethnography’. The relatively low levels of formal education among street children and youth in each of the three cities, presented a barrier to undertaking research. In the academic manuals discussing how to do research, ethnography requires a certain level of academic skills that University researchers take for granted. Not being able to write well was likely to create problems for some around note-taking, yet, even for those who had relatively good academic

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skills (many in Accra and some in Harare and Bukavu) the issue of note-taking remained. Therefore an innovative verbal approach to recording data was adopted, which will be returned to later in the chapter.

The research process follows a similar pattern in each site. First of all, the project managers, who have also trained in ethnographic questioning and listening skills, are in place to support the 6 research assistants in each of their own sites. These young researchers spend time during their week engaging with their network of 10, although in practice as street life is highly relational, the research also captures the wider relationships and networks of each of the participants. They then record their ethnographic observations through weekly reflective interviews with the project managers centred around the 10 capabilities. In addition, focus groups are held with each of the networks quarterly to facilitate the inclusion of the voices of a larger number of young people on specific capability themes and any additional issues emerging as the research progresses. The material is transcribed and translated locally by dedicated project transcribers and sent to the University of Dundee for coding and analysis. The aim is for these findings to then feed into policy and practice to impact street children's lives. In addition, a baseline survey of all 198 young people taking part in the project was conducted at the start of the data collection process and is repeated every year for the duration of the three year project. This enables longitudinal data to be systematically collected and triangulated against the ethnographic interviews. It is our intention that as the analysis progresses we will discuss the findings with the young people and project managers, also involving them in the analysis as a collaborative process.

The emerging analysis of the first year of data is highlighting the complexity of life and choices available to street children and youth. The rich and detailed descriptions are beginning to provide a unique insight into how young people cope with the difficulties of growing up on the street. However, the research is also highlighting the methodological significance of working with street children as researchers. The very experienced team of academics, practitioners, and street workers, have realised that no matter how long they have been working or researching with street children, the dynamics and rhythms of street life are in constant flux, and therefore they have more to learn and understand regarding street life. It is only by constantly re-engaging with young people and learning from street children on a regular basis through participating and listening, that we will understand and be able to work towards investing for their future through utilising the knowledge-based evidence to shape policy and practice. For example, one of the project managers, who has been working on the streets for over 20 years, highlighted that it was only through listening to the detail emerging in the ethnographic stories that he became aware that perhaps local practice needed to change. Like many organisations working with street children, his own NGO provides skills training and helps to establish young people in employment. For many this does not work well. Yet the practice continues. Through the re-telling of a research entry of one of the young female researchers, he realised why there was such a high rate of failure. Girls engaged in hairdressing seemed to enjoy the work and wished to set up their own business yet many failed to do this. One girl in the network that week had been struggling and explained to her researcher that she could not continue to engage in hairdressing even although she had been trained and given some equipment, because she had nowhere to keep the equipment. For many the tools they are given are stolen or destroyed because of a lack of shelter and a safe place to keep them. The project manager realized that the young people had not previously really been listened to regarding their actual needs. By stepping back and allowing the young researchers to take the lead, the street worker reflected that he had learned the value of participatory research. Therefore, in order that young people and project managers also participate in the analysis of data and its outcomes, workshops are held to discuss the emerging findings within and between countries.

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This also mitigates against any misinterpretation of data by project managers, who are the first receivers of information.

Practical and ethical considerations

The actual process of involving young people as researchers has highlighted a number of practical and ethical issues that are significantly more complex when including street children as researchers, than for other children (see Porter et al. 2010 for a comparison). In particular there are three key issues that emerged around 'doing ethnography' that this chapter now addresses before considering some of the nuanced ethical challenges that are critical to street children's participation. One of the first issues that emerged and is specific to street children is around the recording of ethnographic data. Street children, as previously noted, often have relatively few years of formal education resulting in low literacy levels. Although this may be true for other children in situations of poverty, for street children a further issue emerged. Even for those who could write well, note-taking was highlighted as problematic. Once thoughts have been written down the complexity of keeping the notes safe was difficult. The young researchers, most of whom sleep in open and unsecured spaces, do not have safe places to store such sensitive material. This was a key consideration given our commitment to confidentiality of data and the safeguarding of all the young people involved in the research. Over discussion, perhaps imperfectly, the decision was to record material verbally. This has significantly increased the resources required to carry out the research, as transcribers are now needed to convert the spoken material into textual form that can be worked with, and unlike regular ethnographic data collection, notes could not be made when they were fresh in the memory of the researcher. The researchers therefore meet weekly with project managers/trusted street workers who are providing support and guidance during the data collection. The researchers tell their story for the week to the project manager through an informal process, with the project managers occasionally asking for more details, clarification or enquiring about other street children. The presence of the project manager was merely to help to structure the verbal recording but only in so far as to encourage the researcher to provide lots of detail and to be thorough in his/her analysis of the events of the week. As verbal recordings could only be carried out weekly, perhaps this means some detail will be missed; a trade-off for enabling street children to fully participate in the process, but it has also allowed for deeper probing of specific issues through the engagement with the project managers. The longitudinal nature of the research and the collection of weekly stories over a three year period, will perhaps mitigate against any lost material.

A second practical issue that emerged early on was around the retention of street children researchers. It was never the intention that the research would act as a barrier to young people moving on from the street should their circumstances change: this is a necessary part of street life for many and the precariousness of the situations most of the participants find themselves in mean the project is designed to cope with this change. For some the move has been permanent: a girl in Accra dropped out soon after beginning the research because she received funding from a Church to go to secondary school. She does however remain in the project as a network member and regularly engages in updating her situation. A different network member, who had been unable to complete the second training due to the birth of her baby, then received training and took over the role. Others have had more temporary changes in their circumstances, such as the researcher in Bukavu who ended up in prison for a number of months, the researcher in Harare who was persuaded to travel to South Africa in search of a better life and the researcher in Accra who was not allowed by her new boyfriend to continue in the research. Both these young men and young woman returned after sometime and resumed as researchers. All gave very detailed accounts and descriptions of their time

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'away' from the streets, stories that are rarely captured, demonstrating the importance of capturing the fluidity of street life over time and space. However, it raised a problem with vacant periods in the research and there was no easy response to filling the need. In Accra, another researcher worked double covering two networks until the girl was able to return. In Harare and Bukavu, another network member was able to step into the role for a temporary period, having completed the training previously. It could be argued that the 'validity' of the research has been compromised by such changes, but instead this chapter argues that the nuances, complexities and fluidities of street life are more accurately captured through it.

Finally, a relational issue had recently emerged that has a practical consideration. Within each site there are structures of support created to enable the street children researchers to carry out the role. This has resulted in significant engagement with each other as a research team and with project managers as 'trusted adults' in their lives. Further there has been engagement with the project directors at every quarter around the time of the focus groups, and with the other country project managers through yearly meetings that rotate between the cities, and so their presence is well known. Yet, it was not considered that the street children researchers would feel connected to the other sites and wish to learn about and know their fellow researchers in the other cities. The discussion of how they could know what it was like in other places and their desire for understanding was taken seriously although difficult to solve due to cost, lack of identity documents and ethical considerations regarding taking young people out of their own country. A suggestion, by the street children themselves, has been implemented and each researcher has made a short video clip about their lives and networks for internal use to introduce each other across the three cities.

The inclusion of street children as researchers has raised a number of significant ethical issues as well. This was a unique learning experience but through committing to both an ethics of care and an ethics of justice (Abebe and Bessell, 2014) we worked through many of these issues with the young people. Payment for participating in research is one issue that has been regularly critiqued and questioned with the general ethical position of many being not to pay. However, as both Porter et al (2010) and Abebe and Bessell (2014) highlight, when children are actually doing their own research, it is right that they are properly remunerated for their work – otherwise we enter the area of exploitation. With street children, the discussion also has to include issues of care, and raise questions around does providing payment keep children on the streets? Further, are we providing a duty of care if our young researchers buy alcohol or drugs with the money? Following an exploration of the issue with our researchers during their training, and consideration of child rights, we refund our researchers for their lost earnings equal to 2 days per week. This was a mutually agreeable sum (which varies slightly by country) based on the amount of work undertaken and the impact on earning potential. Although we discussed options for young researchers to be able to save some of the money earned (which some opted for), we did not make the payment conditional based on our respect for young people's abilities to make their own decisions around what they earn. In practice while some of their money may be spend on stimulants, it is also used to buy clean food, medicines, clothing and entertainment as well as in some instances shelter provision. Further for some this employment enables them to engage in less risky forms of 'work' for at least some of the time. Our duty of care here emerges in the form of project managers, who in addition to managing the research are on hand to guide, advise and support the researchers and participants in their daily life and choices.

Safety in the research emerged as a related issue, partly to safe keeping of money but also in relation to the protection of young researchers. During the training session, one researcher in Accra noted that it is difficult to keep money due to a lack of safe places. This is especially problematic when sleeping

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as others will 'cut your pockets' and take your money. Although young people have their own strategies for minimising loss, such as dividing their money between pockets, a savings scheme was set up and offered to those that wanted to use it. Of great concern was the ability of the research to adequately protect the researchers during their involvement in the research. Although also an issue for Porter et al (2010) this was mainly related to difficult questions from community members, which can be addressed through training. In reality street life is harsh, often illegal, violent and abusive for many young people (van Blerk 2012). For this reason very strict confidentiality agreements were developed and set up and anyone coming into contact with the material (i.e. for translation purposes etc.) was very heavily vetted. The researchers themselves were asked to adhere to the confidentiality agreement to protect those in their networks. In most instances the research did not create difficulties as young people were researching their own social networks. However, sometimes relationships break down or the trust between network members and the wider research team is thin and the research failed to protect. One young female researcher, for example, had to give up her role for a significant period because her boyfriend, who regularly beat her, was refusing to allow her to participate. Although in the short term, the research seemed to create more difficulties for the researcher, through the support of the project manager she has since been able to leave her boyfriend and resume her role as a young researcher. The research is creating a framework of trust that is enabling and supporting the researchers in their daily life choices.

This highlights a final ethical consideration that the project team are still grappling with around the legacy for the research for young researchers' future lives. Participating in research for street children can help to build confidence and self-esteem as well as develop more formal research skills. Training certificates, that are endorsed by a University, and perhaps letters of recommendation, is one element of the capacity building and skills development portfolio that can open up opportunities for young people as will the acknowledgement on publications and reports of their active involvement in the research process (Porter et al 2010); but again the particular challenges of street life do not make this an easy and straight forward process. Certificates tend to have more currency in formal employment situations, which at least in the short term, may be less attainable for street children. Further, the sensitivity of the material collected and the promise of confidentiality makes it very difficult to list young people as research collaborators or co-authors on publications. More careful consideration needs to be given by researchers, to the outcomes and outputs of research as well as how young researchers can participate in this process. By engaging in an *active* dissemination process with street children (van Blerk and Ansell, 2007) the findings of research will be enhanced and research will be able to promote their voices more effectively. Promoting the voices of street children to others is an essential part of the process and one where their inclusion is pertinent. However, the question of scale is important here. At community level, it is important to disseminate to local audiences, who are actively engaged with the research participants, and can impact on their quality of life through how they treat street children. Street children can, and should be part of this process, and it may be possible to explore with local communities through workshops or community meetings the problems faced through being on the streets and how their understanding can assist in developing potential solutions. It is often more difficult to promote the voices of street children at a policy level without their inclusion being tokenistic. Through dissemination, it is necessary to ensure that participants have the opportunity to consider what should be fed into policy dialogue in terms of what is required to address their needs. Yet, it is important to choose strategies that young people will feel comfortable with as a means to represent their views (Valentine, 1999). Although an ideal scenario may be that street children and policy-makers sit together to work through recommendations or the implementation of solutions that support their rights more effectively into policy, this can have severe limitations and without proper training can be a daunting and difficult prospect for young people. It is

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important not to produce situations where children are merely 'on show', uncomfortable in an unfamiliar context and expected to speak to a formidable audience. Under such conditions children's participation is heavily directed by adult researchers. To overcome this tension, in the 'Growing up on the Streets' research, a potential outcome is to involve young people more directly in knowledge exchange that will include further training on the process and skills required to translate findings into key policy messages as well as equip young people with the tools to impact their ideas effectively in situations where they may feel out of place or uncomfortable. This additional set of skills will also be useful for enabling young people to build future lives they value (Sen, 1999): futures where they decide what is important amidst all the competing pressures they face on the streets. The support framework of the research, over a period of three years, is an inevitable benefit but one that cannot be bluntly removed from the lives of young people who are struggling to meet basic needs at the same time as building futures that they judge to be of value. An exit strategy for the research will have to be thought through carefully and in participation with the young researchers themselves.

Conclusion

The difficulties for researchers of reaching those top rungs on Hart's (1997) ladder of participation means that very few projects with street children have sought to include young people as researchers. Participatory video is one area that has seen some greater participation and inclusion of young researchers (Blazek and Hanrova, 2012; Mistry et al, 2014; Haynes and Tanner, 2013) but there has been less emphasis on active engagement in qualitative research. Further, despite calls for street children's participation to be taken seriously in research (Thomas de Benitez, 2011), the complexity of the task has meant that this has not been achieved at the highest levels. Collaborative work with street children that results in participation in research, has to be commended for representing street children and enabling their voices to be heard, but this cannot go beyond defined moments nor fully reach those instances when researchers are not 'in the field'. Further the harsh realities of street life make it difficult for researchers to fully become immersed in street children's experiences, over time, space and relations. This chapter urges researchers to go beyond the boundaries of acceptable participation and strive to facilitate street children to do their own research. This will not only help to fill in the gaps in knowledge but can provide a richness of data that can challenge current thinking and practice. However, this chapter has also explored that doing this kind of research raises practical and ethical issues that need careful consideration but that by valuing children and respecting their rights in research, these challenges can be overcome and methods adapted to suit the needs of those taking part. Growing up on the streets is still in progress but the project is already revealing the significant capabilities of street children in their striving to create adult lives that they have reason to value.

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