



NatCen

National Centre *for* Social Research

Children's views on taking part in surveys - consent and confidentiality

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Britain's leading independent social research institute

Today's presentation

- Rationale for the study
- Broad methodology
- Some findings
- Concluding thoughts...

Study aims

- Perspectives of *children* on taking part in survey research
- ‘Ethical’ issues
- Addressing two key gaps
 - Survey research
 - Children’s perspectives

Study design

- 8 focus groups in 4 London schools
- Ages 7/8, 9/10, 12/13, 14/15
- 6 or 8 participants; boys and girls together
- 1 or 1.5 hours on school premises
- Use of video stimuli to explore key issues

What we discussed with the children

- Decisions about taking part in surveys
 - Who should have a say?
 - How can we ensure 'informed' consent?
- Incomplete information
 - Ending interviews early, refusing questions, withdrawing data
- Privacy and presence of others
- Confidentiality & disclosure

Decisions about taking part: key questions

- Who should have a say in whether you take part? *Or, what's the role of parents?*
- What would influence your decision to say yes or no?
- What information do you need in order to decide? *Or, what constitutes 'informed' consent?*

Who should have a say - and why?

- Factors influencing children's views include ...
 - Children's rights as subjects
 - Parents' rights of control
 - Parental protection from (perceived) risks
 - Age of the child
 - Where the interview is held
 - Interview topic
- Should parents or children be approached first?

What would influence your decision to say yes or no?

- Factors influencing children's views included ...
 - Salience of the interview topic
 - Value of research
 - Beliefs about confidentiality
 - Feeling comfortable about the interviewer
 - Do you have to take part?
 - Confidence and 'feeling special'

What information do you need to decide?

- Background about the survey
- Practical arrangements
- What will happen to my answers?
- Role of verbal versus written information

Confidentiality: key questions

- Is it ever acceptable to pass on someone's answers?
- How do you decide when it's acceptable or not?

Confidentiality

- ‘Wide’ vs. ‘narrow’ views if justified to breach...
 - Wide – stealing, problems with schoolwork, any bullying
 - Narrow – should not disclose self-harm or parental abuse
- Key considerations
 - What was promised?
 - Has child agreed to disclosure?
 - An ‘important’ issue?
 - Potential outcomes?
 - Alternatives to telling?

Concluding thoughts

- Sensitive or personal topics
- Role of the survey interviewer
 - Ensuring children are comfortable and empowered
 - Information about their characteristics
 - Offering advice
 - Explanation and clarification

Full report on NatCen website

'Children's perspectives on participating in survey research' (2007) by Alice Reeves, Caroline Bryson, Rachel Ormston and Clarissa White, NatCen: London (ISBN: 978-1-904599-79-1)

[www.natcen.ac.uk/pages/publications/
children_perspectives_on_participating.pdf](http://www.natcen.ac.uk/pages/publications/children_perspectives_on_participating.pdf)

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