



Systems and strategies for identifying and enumerating children outside of family care[☆]

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 7 September 2012

Accepted 7 September 2012

Available online 18 October 2012

Keywords:

Capture recapture

Family care

Household

Respondent driven

Street children

Time-location

ABSTRACT

Methodologies to identify and enumerate children outside of family care vary as do the vulnerability categories of the children themselves. Children outside of family care is a broad term encompassing children absent of permanent family care, e.g., institutionalized children, children on/of the street, child-headed households, separated or unaccompanied children, trafficked children, children working in exploitive labor situations, etc. This paper reviews the various methodologies applied to identify and enumerate these often hidden and/or mobile populations. Methodologies that identify and enumerate children outside of family strive to meet two objectives: (1) to estimate the number and characteristics of a specific vulnerability category and (2) to determine eligibility to receive services. The paper reviews eight methodologies; six are categorized as survey sample methods (time-location sampling, capture recapture sampling, respondent driven sampling, the neighborhood method, household surveys, and establishment surveys) while two were labeled as data management systems (child labor management system, and databases of institutions). Each review includes a concise description of the methodology, its strengths and limitations, the most appropriate population it is suited to identify and/or enumerate, and any necessary conditions. Conclusions from these reviews advocate for tailoring a methodology (or a combination of methodologies) to the specific circumstances under which it is meant to identify or enumerate children outside of family care. In addition, further research and validation studies are needed to identify the conditions under which the strategies described here can be used and to develop appropriate protocols for utilization

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Introduction

This paper will review a range of approaches to the challenge of identifying and enumerating children outside of family care. In part, it serves to introduce the later papers in this special issue, which focus on the kinds of programs and interventions that can be directed toward such children.

[☆] The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the agencies of the US Government or other institutions that employ the authors.

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Children outside of family care (COFC) are a highly vulnerable group with a generally elevated risk of negative outcomes. They include children in institutions and detention; street associated children; children heading households; children who are separated or unaccompanied as a result of conflict or disaster; children associated with armed forces and groups; children who work as live-in domestic servants; and children who are trafficked for forced labor and/or sexual exploitation. Throughout this issue, “institutions,” “residential institutions” and “residential care” are used synonymously to refer to residential facilities in which groups of children are cared for by paid personnel. More description of these vulnerable groups is provided in paper X.

In a narrow sense, “identifying and enumerating” refers to the task of listing and counting, for example within a geographical area, the children who are eligible for some kind of intervention. The terms suggest that criteria for eligibility have been met and each child’s name has been recorded. In the present context, however, the children are hard to reach. Children outside of family care usually do not live in households and are not included in any kind of registration system with unique identifiers. Attempts to identify and enumerate such children must generally be selective and incomplete.

The methods described in this paper have two principal objectives. The first is to estimate the number and characteristics of a category of COFC who are in a country, city, or other sub-national geographic entity. For example, in order to assess the level of need for interventions, it could be useful to have an estimate of the number of child-headed households in Kenya and the regions where they tend to be located. This estimate could be derived from a national survey of households, and because Kenya regularly conducts such surveys for many different purposes, the re-analysis of existing data files could be sufficient.

As another example, it could be desirable to estimate the number of street associated children in Nairobi. For this purpose, a household survey would be inadequate, but a capture/recapture sampling strategy could be used. If, instead, the goal were to describe children of the streets, in terms of their age, sex, nutritional status, etc., rather than to estimate their number, then time-location sampling would be a more appropriate choice. Time-location sampling would not be suitable for estimating the size of this population, and capture/recapture sampling would be an inefficient approach for describing the characteristics of the population.

A second possible objective is to identify specific children who are eligible to receive assistance under some program or intervention. A household survey is not generally appropriate for this purpose. Interview teams have very specialized training, and responses are treated with strict confidentiality. Regardless of the level of deprivation, the data are collected for statistical purposes only. Any departure from this rule could increase refusal rates or bias the responses, undermining the quality of the data being collected. By contrast, methodologies such as respondent driven sampling, the neighborhood method, and methods specifically for child laborers are appropriate to identify specific children for assistance.

Most of the methods presented here relate to the first objective, to estimate the numbers and characteristics of children who need assistance or interventions. Such approaches are important for assessing needs, targeting programs, and developing criteria for assistance. Fewer methods can be used for the more difficult second objective, to identify specific beneficiaries for specific interventions.

While significant progress has been made to develop new approaches, identifying children outside of family care and assessing their living conditions raises serious methodological and practical challenges. These populations often reside in isolated and hard to reach locations, or live in conditions of illegality and secrecy that may hinder the process of data collection. Official records and administrative sources commonly underestimate the true magnitude of the affected populations. Reporting mechanisms are often nonexistent and their reliability may be compromised by high levels of inefficiency, corruption or stigma. Even the existence of records can lead to criminalization and increased vulnerability for the affected children. As will be discussed in paper 2, the collection of data on these populations can raise ethical challenges.

As discussed in Higgs and Balster (paper X), the evidence review process led to a variety of methods for identifying and enumerating children outside of family care. The paper will review eight methods serving one or both of the objectives described above. They will be presented in two groups, survey sampling designs and data management systems or databases, that roughly correspond to the two objectives.

This inventory is certainly not exhaustive, but the methods described here are believed to be the most appropriate ones available for the vulnerability groups discussed in this special issue. The presentation of most methods will follow the same format, with a description of the method, specification of the most applicable populations, and a discussion of the method’s strengths and limitations. The format will be abbreviated for some methods that have been used almost exclusively in the context of child labor.

Survey sample methods

Time-location sampling

Time-location sampling or TLS (also known as time-space or venue sampling) is a probabilistic sampling strategy used to recruit members of a target population known to congregate at specific times in set venues (Gayet & Fernández-Cerdeño, 2009). As explained by Muhib et al. (2001), TLS “will produce a systematic sample of members of a targeted population who attend specific venues in a community” (p. 221).

The sampling frame is comprised of venue-day-time units (VDTs), or time-location units which represent the universe of possible venues, days and times at which the target population is known to gather (e.g., a specific bar, Friday, midnight

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