

Connecting with Migrants, Refugee Children and Youth in Pakistan: Challenges and Possibilities

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Abstract

Research with children and young adults in safe environments is fraught enough, but the process of such research becomes rather more challenging when the children and youth are from migrant and refugee families. This research was conducted in Rawalpindi and Islamabad cities of Pakistan. An ethnographic approach was used to explore the daily lives of the Afghan and Pathan children and youth working on the streets. Access to the children and their families was initially made through different support organizations. A variety of qualitative participatory tools and techniques such as semi structured interviews, visual and observation techniques were used to gain and sustain the trust of the children and youth. These techniques also enabled useful rich data and an in-depth understanding of the children's and youths' daily lives, including the effectiveness of the support organizations for these disadvantaged young people. However, the worth of such tools and techniques varies according to circumstance, and they all need adaptation in different research settings.

Keywords: migrant children and youth; refugee children and youth, Pakistan; ethnographic research, support organizations.

Introduction

Involving children and youth in research in those matters which relate to them is a right given in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 (UNCRC, 1989; Liebel, 2012, p. 13). The Articles 12, 13 and 17 focus on the centrality of respect for the views of the child. These Articles call for the views and voices of children to be heard and respected. Such perspectives align with the paradigm of 'New' Sociology of Childhood first propounded widely by James and Prout (1997, pp. 8-9). According to this paradigm, children are, and must be seen as, active in the construction and determination of their own social lives. Thus, the two frameworks of the UNCRC and the Sociology of Childhood support and require the researcher to perceive children as individual beings who must be consulted in those matters which affect them directly or indirectly, precisely because a foundation assumption is that they have their own agency. They have capabilities as adults, can raise their voice - if a chance is given - and need to be studied as part of the society, not as a separate a-contextual category. Perhaps even more importantly, these underpinning assumptions and approaches are essential with all sorts of children and youth, regardless of their culture, status, ethnicity, or religion. At the same time, the very richness of the myriad differences serves as a warning to scholars that their research must take account of different needs even while adhering to fundamental research assumptions inherent in UNCRC and the Sociology of Childhood.

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This article focuses on the qualitative research tools and techniques in an ethnographic study, while also respecting the capacities choices of children and youth to participate in the research. It will explore the dynamics of research, paying particular attention to the engagement of migrant children and youth in a community that has only rarely been researched to any depth, especially the young people. I sought, in my project, to understand how children and youth see research and the ways they wanted to be engaged in the research process. Such questions raised further points such as: What significant contribution could children and youth offer in to increase understanding of their daily lives? In what ways could they be effectively involved and engaged in the research? To answer those questions, this article is focussed on the design and effect of the research techniques, and the ways in which they were found to have benefited the research study group. The paper explores the nature and ethics of the research process, and in so doing, seeks to highlight the issues in using different tools and techniques. As well, this paper looks to demonstrate that the choice of research methods and techniques must take account of different geographical, cultural, economic, cultural and sociological situations. What may work in Nigeria or Peru might not work in different settings such as in Pakistan with migrant children. This article also considers means to effectively adapt research tools and techniques to recognize the different needs (see e.g., Young & Barrett 2001; IDS 2009).

Research with Children and Youth

Scholars such as James & Prout (1997), and Morrow (2005, 2008, p. 52) attest to the challenges in undertaking investigating with children and youth. Many analysts have noted that research processes when working with children are often complicated, in large part because the individuals within such studies are under eighteen and have the right to full protection from any harm during the research (Morrow, 2008, p. 52; Punch, 2002). Researchers have also emphasized the need to ameliorate the unequal power relationship between a researcher and a child as well as other ethical issues related to the research relationship between a researcher and children (Qvortrup, Corsaro, & Honig, 2009; Stephens 1995).

Such considerations become even more complicated when research is with or for disadvantaged children. If scholars are not mindful of their ethical research responsibilities, working children on the streets, for example, may be considered as objects of research, precisely because they are excluded from the 'normal' society. In terms of this paper, these challenges are even greater when researching with migrant children and youth living in different living and working situations. The research processes must not only obtain data but in order to ensure real capacity for participation, they must also be given the opportunity to reflect upon their lives (Okoli, 2014; Hemming & Madge, 2011; Powell et al., 2012). Yet despite the debates and the plethora of excellent research, such issues are still only rarely recognised in research undertakings in Pakistan.

Taking heed of all the challenges and complications in research with or about children, and the ethical considerations and child friendly methodologies possible, I sought to involve the Afghan and Pathan children working on the streets and their families in urban Pakistan. This research was part of an investigation of the effectiveness of support organisations which seek to assist the Afghan and Pathan children in their daily lives. Based on sociology of childhood and the UNCRC frameworks I wanted to examine if and how children could be involved in the research and what methodological tools could help or limit gains in building an in-depth understanding of children and youth daily lives while they were working on the streets. The final aim was to see the extent to which children and youth could be active agents in research, and the ways they could share their lived experiences through different methods and techniques.

Study Group

Pakistan is a Muslim country with a population of 190 million comprising several ethnic groups, including Punjabi 44.68%, Pashtun (Pathan) 15.42%, Sindhi 14.1%, Sariaki 8.38%, Muhajirs 7.57%, and Balochi 3.57%. Many of the Pathan families in Rawalpindi and Islamabad studied in this research are internally displaced people (IDPs). The current estimated figure of IDPs in Pakistan is one million from different parts of the Kyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province north-west of Islamabad and Federally Administrative Tribal Areas (FATA) due to various reasons (CIA, 2014). The most important reason for IDPs was the internal insurgency within KPK which began in 1987 when Pakistan became a frontline state in the war between USSR and USA in Afghanistan (Kivisto & Faist, 2010, p. 35). Pakistan's situation was exacerbated after the 9/11 attack in the United States, in which Pakistan became the frontline against global terrorism.

Other Pathan families migrated to Pakistan's cities because of a lack of employment opportunities in their villages, towns or cities. Most IDPs are from small villages and towns, where they were involved in agriculture on small tracts of land, or doing menial jobs. Poverty has tended to prevail more in rural areas than in the cities in Pakistan, because people have fewer choices, fewer employment opportunities and less access to micro credit provision. Secondly, people have fewer assets and less capability of absorbing macroeconomic and natural disaster shocks (Arif & Farooq, 2012, p. 22). Thus many people have migrated from their native areas to big cities where they believed they would have more opportunities. That was the main motive of many Pathan families studied in this research who had migrated to the cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi due to the cities' development and their perceived potential employment opportunities.

In addition to IDPs, a rough estimate shows that almost 3.3 million Afghanis took refuge in Baluchistan and north-west of Pakistan during the USSR war in Afghanistan from 1979-1989 (ISW, 2014, Russia and Afghanistan). At that time, Pakistan took a welcoming attitude to Afghans and accommodated them with the help of different western countries (Ghufran, 2011, pp. 945-48). However, political instability and changing political interests in Pakistan have played an important role in defining or ignoring the needs and rights of Afghan refugees in the last three decades (Ghufran, 2011, p. 948). Moreover, despite the fact that Pakistan is hosting the most Afghan refugees of any of the surrounding countries, there is continuous political tension between the Pakistan and Afghanistan governments, which, in turn, has resulted in a longstanding lack of cooperation in defining refugees' status, or the means of their support or repatriation (Kronenfeld, 2008). However with the technical assistance of UNHCR in 2012, the government of Pakistan approved a National Policy on Afghan Refugees focusing on effective implementation of the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries (SSAR) and developing a national law in Pakistan (see UNHCR Global report, 2013). This research focused on some of those children and youth who had migrated with their families who are not independent migrants. As noted above these young people belong to a large and growing section of Pakistan's population and building their skills and capacities would be of national benefit. At present, a majority of the migrants live in considerable poverty which is why some aid and support organizations seek to offer education and Drop-In services to the children and youth. However, more research is needed to understand what are their needs and potential for advancing their standards of living. This research sought to go some small way towards these ideals.

Table 1. Distribution of children and youth who migrated and live in twin cities (%)

Migration pattern	percentage (n=30)
Afghan migrated from Afghanistan	16.6
Pathan Internally displaced (IDPs)	33.5
Pathan live in twin cities who are born in twin cities	22.2
Afghan refugees live in twin cities who are born in Pakistan	27.7

Source: Data from this research

Research Setting

The data generation was conducted in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad in 2012. The study group was the Afghan and Pathan children and youth working on the streets, living with their families and helping families financially usually due to poverty that had arisen from their internal and cross-border migration. The sample size comprised thirty (30) girls and boys, aged between twelve and sixteen over the period of seven months of fieldwork in an ethnographic research (Fetterman, 2010). The selection criterion for this sample was that children and youth should be part of an organisation providing services to assist them in their daily lives, had been working on the streets at least for a year and living in the slum areas of twin cities where the organisations are working for their welfare and development. These children and youth were enrolled in government and non-governmental organisations which were providing services to assist working children and youth such as Drop-In-Centres (DICs), formal and non-formal schooling, and stipends.

Research Process

A combination of methods for data collection and data generation were used drawing on experiences of other respected researchers who had reflected on their research with children or youth (see Young & Barrett, 2001, p. 142; Suarez-Orzco&Carhill, 2008) define. At heart, like all good qualitative research, there is no one method which guarantees success. Rather, multiple methods and techniques which have been used effectively in different contexts should guide new researchers. Not only is it axiomatic that one method could not provide the rich knowledge required for understanding the children's lives and childhoods. As well, triangulation of methods also satisfies questions of reliability and validity that are sometimes raised with regard to qualitative research. The multiple methods used in this research not only yielded stronger and richer data, but also as scholars have noted, had the additional benefit of keeping up children's interest in the whole research process (Morrow, 2001; Christensen & James, 2000). The three primary methods in this project were in-depth semi-structured interviews, participative tools and techniques, and participant observation. These are evaluated below in light of other researchers' findings.

In-depth Semi Structured Interviews

Semi structured interviews have long been considered to be one of the most effective methods to generate data as has been discussed by Mizen & Ofosu-Kusi (2010), Fetterman (2010), and Abebe (2013). In this project, in-depth semi structured interviews were conducted with 30 children and youth (girls and boys), although, I found the process difficult in the Pakistani research context. The main reason for the difficulty was that generally in Pakistan, children and youth have been socialised to only be expected to answer defined questions in a survey, rather than express their views or interpret their worlds. This expectation has tended to constrain children from raising their voices, concerns and opinions in the research process. Such limitations were exacerbated by the ethical requirements of my university at the time of research which required that I consult children and youth only through specific support organizations, limiting both the sample pool and sample size.

Nevertheless, the range of children and young people as a sample for qualitative research such as interviews and participant observation was broad and certainly provided considerable insights for research and policy-making that would not have been available in surveys or similar research.

However, qualitative research, while yielding excellent data is very time-consuming. In the early stages of my fieldwork, the staff members of the specified organisations revealed impatience, resentment and reluctance at this seemingly child-centered research data-gathering process. They were mystified that the children and youth could set the interview settings, interview times and even the interview questions to some extent. Indeed, the organizations' staff felt that I was wasting my time and energies, and that my research would never finish if I continued with my research approach. It was difficult to convince them of the desirability of my chosen research processes and to gain their sustained support. However, staff began to accept me as part of their organisation once I showed my commitment to the processes and became a regular and accepted visitor, as well as demonstrated continuing support from the head offices and importantly, the sustained interest of children in the research. Indeed, it was encouraging that by the end of this research, the staff showed some understanding and appreciation of the research process.

Although interviews were semi-structured and were able to be changed according to a child's or youth's responses, I found that children and youth were not very confident in talking about their lives. Even though I allocated several weeks to build trust and rapport and, even though I was introduced by the staff of the different organizations, the children and youth were rarely open and relaxed while talking about their lives. For example, during an interview, conducted in a non-formal school, a 12 year-old boy responded in this way to the interview:

Researcher: Would you like to talk about your life experiences with me?

Boy : [pause] I do not know what to talk about.

Researcher: Anything which you like to share?

Boy : I have nothing to talk about. My life is boring and has a routine.

Researcher: Ok, then can we talk about your routine?

Boy : [reluctantly] I do not like to talk about my routine, it's full of responsibilities (recorded interview on 22 February, 2012) .

This conversation can be analysed in two ways. Firstly the key respondent was not ready to talk about his routinized life due to what he saw was its boring nature, since it was very personal to him and he was quite shy about describing it. Secondly, he was exercising his agency not to participate in this research, or challenge the method of research. During the data gathering, some of the children and youth, were reluctant to participate in interviews, but they participated in other participatory exercises eagerly and actively, discussing their lives openly and in a relaxed manner.

In the same way, during the interviews it was found that the context of interviewing was especially important for working children and youth. For example, the ways that they expressed their feelings, attitudes and behaviours while they were in DICs and schools were quite different from when they were in their actual working situations with the researcher, even though in both situations the informal discussion was directed towards understanding their working environment. The interviews conducted on the premises of the DICs and schools and sometimes in front of staff (to spare the children from any traumatic situation or any unethical questioning under Ethics Committee restrictions), they revealed different things appropriate to those venues. As mutual trust and interest grew, discussions became more informal, and open. Much more information and opinion were offered when we were visiting the places where they worked or where they played or while visiting their favourite places, or

while drawing or writing about themselves. In these discussions they were more open about the organization's facility or service which they were attending. For example, they told me about their friendships, their networking, their workplace learning, the ways of communication with each other, about the teachers and learning in the schools or in DICs, what they liked or disliked in schools and DICs, and about going to internet cafe, among other things.

The qualitative interviews with the children and youth ranged from 20 minutes to one hour. That time span was designed take account of their limited span of attention. In those interviews, they were asked about their lifeworlds, childhoods, their recreation, their work and workplace, and the effectiveness of organisations' programmes and services which they used. They were also asked what they would tell their support organizations what was good or suggest what could be improved, as well as the extent to which they were involved in the decision making of the programmes and projects of the organisations.

There were also difficulties with timing and time span of the interviews. The study group in this research had financial responsibility for their families and frequently could not offer a specific time in advance for interviews. Sometimes they could sit and talk for 10 minutes only, and would then have to run to catch a customer or to help their families who were working at the same location. As it was difficult to sit with them at a specific place and for a specific time in the working environment, the interviews were broken into many sessions where we talked on different aspects of their lived experiences. During the interviews, it became obvious that interviews, even semi-structured or informal interviews were not sufficient for getting a complete understanding of the lives of children and their perspectives about the organisations in which they were involved. It is not that semi-structured interviews have major weaknesses but rather that it is difficult to maintain the textbook prescriptions for conducting interviews in different settings, and, as always with research, adaptation is needed in different contexts.

Acknowledging the limitations of semi-structured interviews and the difficulties in a different setting, a range of other techniques were used during and after semi-structured interviews. These brought more enriched data from the children and youth, enabled the research to meet triangulation criteria so often designated as essential, and brought reflexivity into the research process.

Participatory Tools and Techniques

Drawings, photo elicitation, and writing about themselves and the support organisations and their roles in their lives were other useful research techniques designed to break the ice between the researcher and a child as well as obtain richer data. These techniques complemented the interviews, gave more detailed and nuanced understanding of the children, and also proved to build rapport and trust with them (see Christensen & James, 2000; Morrow, 2001 for further discussion on these issues).

These interactive exercises created fun, and in so doing, encouraged the children to be more open about discussing their lives while being involved in their activities. As some scholars have noted (see e.g. Boyden & Ennew, 1997), it is essential to develop activities which are suitable for the age and interest of the young key informants. Drawing on such familiar topics such as 'my life' (answering questions such as 'what was the most important thing in their life'), their workplace, or their favourite things to eat, provided rich insights that would have been difficult to get with the use of more formal techniques. Through the explanation of the drawings, further information was generated (see Punch, 2002). However, requests for explanation of the drawings were done with caution because as it is argued in the literature, it is important to avoid any embarrassment to children so they should not be asked directly what they have drawn. On the other hand, it is important to clarify the ideas behind

the drawings (Punch, 2002). The clarification was thus done in a delicate way, by asking questions such as: You drew the mosques, 'what do you think of it' and 'what do you like or dislike about it', 'what do you learn at the mosque?', 'what is the environment of a mosque and how does it affect you.' As I had never been to the male side of a mosque, the children understood this cultural aspect and explained their impressions to me enthusiastically according to their understanding.

These experiences contrast with those of Jabeen (2009) who worked with street children in Lahore - Pakistan. Jabeen (2009) reported that it was not easy to use participatory tools and techniques with street children because they did not have a place to sit for such activities and also because of time constraints. I was fortunate that it proved to be easy for me to arrange interactive activities because the children and youth were coming to the organizations. The use of the facility offered a proper place to sit and the capacity to adapt my data generation to meet their time constraints. Indeed the children and youth took a great deal of interest in the research process, ensured it became lively and interactive, and readily shared their personal lives with the researcher. In using the various alternative research exercises, many things were explored which had been avoided or unexplained during the formal interviews as explained above. Ultimately, the activities were more useful than semi-structured interviews with the Pathan and Afghan children and youth working on the streets. The interest of the children and youth was piqued by their sharing of experiences through the interactive tools and techniques which offered them new experiences and opportunities. They all said that they had never had a chance to be involved in interactive activities to explain their lived experiences. It became clear then, that the information gained during discussion would yield rich insights. This was apparent in the wealth of information gained from a young girl.

Researcher: You want to draw something?

Girl : Yes, I want to draw my employer's home?

Researcher: [surprised] Why do you want to draw your employer's home?

Girl : [happily] Because I like them as they are very supportive and helpful to me.

Researcher: [asked while she was drawing] What kind of help have they provided to you?

Girl : [answered while drawing] They supported my schooling until I finished my eight grade. They also supported me to complete my Quranic schooling in a madrasa (recorded interview on 15 March, 2012).

The participatory exercises thus made it easy for the children and youth to explain their daily lives experiences in a relaxed manner and in so doing exercised the agency. In these exercises, they were leading and controlling the research and were also the decision makers about what they wanted to share and discuss about their lives and families. Topics such as migration, social exclusion, ways of dealing with the new environment of living and working, discrimination and rejection and loneliness all became easy to discuss in detail with the Afghan and Pathan children and youth.

Participant Observation

Participant observation has long been held as one of the most important techniques in ethnography. Certainly it was useful to get detailed information about aspects of the Afghan and Pathan working children's lives. Generally participant observation is defined as the technique where the researcher notes and records the events, behaviour and artifacts (objects and subjects of study) in a social setting chosen for study (Wolcott, 2008). Other scholars who have also discussed the values and perils of participants' observation including Fetterman (2010, p. 37) and Wolcott (2008, pp. 50-54). In my research, this method

contributed to my understanding of aspects which had not been described by the key informants in interviews; in some cases information was withheld not deliberately, but rather the informants had refrained from stating what to them was normal or obvious. The use of participant observation enabled me to explore their perception of different phenomenon and how they conceptualised different issues, how they interacted and negotiated within family and working environment, how they reacted to any situation, what were their chosen recreations and their likes and dislikes of different phenomena. For example, it was interesting to observe Afghan girls who asserted in interviews that they did not beg but during a day spent with them on the streets revealed clearly that they did beg, albeit in a different and interesting way. Similarly, the children working in the vegetable and fruit market who claimed that they never cheated people on weighing or charging high prices, were clearly seen to cheat in their workplaces when I bought things from them as a customer. Non-participant observations were also valuable as a way to check the accuracy of the information provided earlier during other data gathering. I took detailed field notes of observations and undertook self-reflective memo writing on a daily basis, noting down the important matters, events, and activities in which working children were involved.

Being a female, it was difficult for me to accompany the boys all the time, or to visit all places where they went, such as internet cafes or CD shops to watch movies. Similarly observing their activities in the late evenings or their efforts at following girls were very fraught for a female researcher. However, I still managed to go with them to their workplaces and areas where they played cricket, flew kites, and played with balls. All of that gave me considerable opportunity to observe the daily lives of young teenage boys in a culturally restricted society, where conventions prevent a female from 'hanging out' with boys of this age, no matter what is the reason. During participant observations, I had to clarify my role to many people, including the relatives of the boys. Indeed, I was frequently drilled for personal information to explain my activities. I was asked personal questions about where I lived, whether I was married, and who was my husband. Others asked what did my husband do, how many kids did I have, and upon finding I only had one child, I was asked why was that so and when was I going to have another child. Other people questioned me on why and how my husband had allowed me to study abroad on my own, among many other questions. As I needed to complete my research in such a way that I would retain the trust of children and youth and their families, I had to also accept their right to question and my responsibility to answer all their questions (see Khalid, 2014). I not only understood the precautionary and security points of view of parents and families, but I also knew the culture. It is part of the culture to be inquisitive about a stranger especially if a stranger is a woman. However, during this whole process of questions and inquisitiveness, children and youth with whom I worked, showed a positive and an encouraging attitude towards me and to the research overall. Due to this positive attitude I continued observations as a useful means of understanding their daily lives in a range of different settings.

In some respects, to observe girls and their activities was easier, because observations were done within the home. Nevertheless, there were still challenges and complications. For example, to get permission to visit the houses was a major challenge. Although I was introduced to the studied girls through the support organizations where they attended, it was difficult to get access to their homes. For this, I had to convince elder sisters and mothers to let me observe their activities at homes. The families expressed many concerns. For example, due to their poverty level, they were not comfortable to let any other person inside who did not belong to the same economic stratum. It was matter of status and shame for them. Another worry for the families was that they thought that entertaining a researcher/teacher was something which would cost money and so, would be a kind of extra burden. Not surprisingly some said that observing the activities involved an exposure of

private lives which they did not want to be explored. This included what they ate, how they lived in a joint family system, how big was the house, and how many people lived in a house. It was a time-consuming process to allay all their concerns. In so doing I undertook to bear any cost related to the researcher's observations, and not to share anything with their neighbours or relatives. In this matter, many ethical considerations were taken to maintain the privacy and anonymity of the studied group.

Paradoxically however, there were other ethical challenges. This was because in this process of observation, the researcher had been asked by girls to advocate girls' education in front of their brothers and fathers. In addition to this, there were many odd situations where fathers and brothers were inquisitive, intrusive or sometimes simply gave unpleasant feelings. However, girls and their mothers remained very supportive during the research, and I managed to complete observations and explore the lives of these girls who work on the streets but live in a restricted environment with their families.

Overall, non-participant observation and participatory exercises proved the most fruitful techniques for gaining an in-depth understanding of children's and youth daily lives. The application of these two tools and techniques of generating data, enabled the children and youth to become confident and open with the researcher. Moreover, they felt empowered as they were genuinely the decision-makers about what to say or do. In addition to this, they gained from many new experiences, such as drawing, colouring, photo-elicitation (Khalid & Kelly, forthcoming) which attracted them and maintained their interest in the research. They came to know that research can be interesting and they can have agency in it.

It was observed that children and youth were slightly hesitant in the beginning of the research but they became more open and relaxed when they had more sessions with me and I went to different places with them. There is no doubt that the rapport building process was time-consuming and took much effort. However, this time demanding process ended with a sustainable trusting relationship and a superior in-depth understanding of phenomena that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, the whole process of conducting research in the Pakistani cultural context was demanding and sometimes tiresome. I had faced many difficulties and challenges during seven months of the ethnographic research (see Khalid, 2014).

Conclusion

This paper sought to show the importance of ethical and empowering techniques when researching migrant children, youth and families, while at the same time arguing of the importance of taking heed of local, regional and national differences in any ethnographic research. It also explored the ways in which multiple research techniques are essential, not only because they meet criteria of thoroughness and comprehensiveness, but also because different forms of investigation take account of individual differences. Finally, it was shown that not only do these multiple techniques provide rich information, but they are also indications of respect for the children and youth.

The challenges for the researcher were firstly to involve the key informants in such a way that they felt comfortable, and relaxed, and, secondly, to offer them the opportunity to learn new ways to express their experiences and opinions. The children and youth responded differently to the different methods and techniques, and these different responses highlight again the importance adapting and varying methods to meet the needs and interests of the informants. In so doing, I was made sure that children and youth felt that in the research relationship, they had the power to say they chose to be part of the research or to quit the research. Thus in this research, the children and youth believed that they had the chance to say no to the researcher without any fear and hesitation. Given the capacity to choose their involvement, they also talked freely about their lifeworlds with the researcher. In part this

trust in the researcher came from acceptance by the researcher of cultural mores and practices which enabled empathy to be built up between the researcher and the participants. This article might help those researchers who are working with migrant children, youth and their families. However, as has been shown in this paper, adaptation data gathering methods and techniques is always needed to better understand the hidden realities of children's lifeworlds.

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