Adaptations to a Cohort Study in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Insights from Growing Up in Ireland

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Introduction

AIM OF GUI?
To improve our understanding of the experiences & development of young people, with a view to informing policy & services

HOW?
Face-to-face (in-home) interviews with two cohorts of young people

Fig: Timeline of Fieldwork in GUI
Outline of ‘normal’ fieldwork

- Family receives advance letter/info pack
- Interviewer visits to family home to arrange interview
  - First contact always face-to-face
- Interviewer administers a questionnaire in the home
- Participants self-complete sensitive questionnaire
- Interviewer takes physical measurements
- Young person completes cognitive tests
- Visit takes approximately 2-3 hours
Timeline of pandemic/fieldwork

First confirmed case in Ireland: Feb 2020

Lockdown Restrictions:
- Schools close (12th)
- Stay-at-home (27th)

Start of 13yr Pilot Fieldwork: March

Start of 13yr Main Fieldwork: July

Special Online COVID Survey: Dec

July 2021

Two options: POSTPONE or ADAPT?
Adaptations for Pilot

**PILOT: test procedures / content for main fieldwork**

- **Interview mode changed:** remote (phone/online)
- **Initial contact by phone / email:** consent by phone
- **Reduced questionnaires:**
  - Focus on new items
  - Questions added on *pandemic impact*
  - Survey hosted by CSO
- **Items removed**
- **Changes to logistical procedures**
  - Interviewer training
  - No paperwork
LESSONS FROM PILOT:

- **Participants** gave positive and negative feedback
- **Interviewers** had mixed experience of new modes
  - **Positive**: convenient, quicker, less driving around
  - **Negative**: less personal, lost rapport, consent process, no paperwork

ADAPTATIONS FOR MAIN:

- Retain **remote modes** of data collection
- Families **sent letter/info pack** beforehand
- **Interviewer training** conducted remotely
- Questionnaires needed to be substantially **shortened**
  - But with added COVID-19 items
Adaptations for Main

Shortening questionnaires – consider if...

• there’s an **alternative indicator**?
  e.g. ask child about smoking habits / bullying, not parent

• it’s too **burdensome**?
  e.g. Piers-Harris 60-item vs. Rosenberg 10-item scale

• longitudinal **comparability** compromised?
  e.g. attendance at religious services

• **not possible** to measure via phone / online
  e.g. physical measures, cognitive test, time-use diary
Aim:
• To capture contemporary data on pandemic experience

Methodological Adaptations:
• Web-based survey
• Participants contacted via email/text
• Informed consent/assent received via our website
• Very short questionnaire

Lessons Learned:
• Response rate lower
• Impact of pandemic warrants long-term exploration
Conclusion

- The pandemic determined that adaptations were required to avoid disrupting schedule

- The GUI study team was successful in....
  - adopting remote modes of data collection
  - collecting contemporary data on pandemic experiences

- Main 13-year fieldwork currently underway – response rate?

- Some adaptations are arguably preferable
  - Notable environmental/cost-related benefits e.g. interviewer training

- Need to explore the long-term impact of the pandemic
Thanks

• GUI Study Team
• Our colleagues at DCEDIY, CSO and Trinity College
• The young people and their families for their continued participation and commitment to the study

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