FAQ 12: How can I recruit particular subgroups of children?

What's the issue?

Sometimes researchers want to study a specific population or particular subgroups of children, which may not be easy to recognize or reach through the usual ways of recruiting. This may be the case for quantitative, and even more so for qualitative, research, which is often used when there is little known about the phenomena under study.

Common practice

- Internet discussion forums or mailing lists on a vast amount of topics that are available nowadays can provide a useful way of recruiting particular subgroups of older children and teenagers. Researchers could go to a specific high school forum to recruit teenagers for a study about their use of media in everyday life.
- If researchers want various subgroups (e.g. age subgroups or gender subgroups of children) in the sample, they could use stratified random sampling, which combines stratified sampling with random sampling. For example, if researchers wanted a stratified random sample of boys and girls from the last year of primary school, they would first separate the entire population of the last year primary school pupils into two groups, one all boys and the other all girls. To complete the sampling they would then independently select a random sample from each stratum (a random sample of boys and another of girls).

Questions to consider

Particular subgroups that deserve special attention in research on the use of ICT are socially vulnerable and underprivileged children. Recruiting young children from this background requires more effort to gain the confidence of the parents who are often not acquainted with or even suspicious of the formal and asymmetrical relationship between the (academic) researcher and themselves. Doing research with teenagers with a socially less privileged background urges researchers to be reflective about their own social position, their idiom and their attitude, and how this all affects the research process.

Researchers' experiences

In the first attempt to conduct a questionnaire on mobile phone use by young teenagers in Greece, I thought of using the Greek School Network (GSN) (ideally, this would have meant that the designed questionnaire would electronically reach teenagers across the country, thus allowing me to have a representative sample in terms of geography, urban area, socio-economic status, and so on, according to my needs). I soon discovered that the bureaucracy involved in dealing with the Greek Ministry of Education meant that it would take anything between three and six months in order to have an answer as to whether or not I would be allowed access to the GSN; providing I did receive a positive answer, I would still need another few months to select a limited number of school units which I would then have to visit physically; conducting research over the internet proved impossible. In order to circumvent this problem, I used informal networks: I approached my mathematician at my old *frontistirio* (all students in Greece are driven, sooner or later, to such institutions where they practice for their A levels at school, for a fee), now coaching a new generation of high school students. I bypassed all the bureaucratic prerequisites and other practical obstacles of the official process in the corridors of the *frontistirio* and managed to gain access to approximately 200 teenagers aged 15–18. I had 30 more questionnaires gathered through a Master's student of mine who used his connections at his old school and handed out the questionnaire to one classroom. Lesson learned: there are always ways to improvise and overcome the inflexibility of the system. (Lisa Tsaliki, Greece)

In the TIRO research project we wanted to include young people with a Moroccan or Turkish background (the biggest Muslim minority ethnic group in Belgium) in the qualitative research, but failed. We underestimated the hesitancy of both the teenagers and their parents to participate in academic research that represented the (Belgian) establishment in society. It also occurred to us that the youth movements

and clubs we visited to recruit teenagers were predominantly 'white', so we had to look for other settings and intermediaries. Since we were not prepared for this, we ran out of time, and had to bury this plan. (Joke Bauwens, Belgium)

References and further resources

Kalton, G. (1983). *Introduction to survey sampling*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Greene, S. & Hogan, D. (2005). *Researching children's experiences: Methods and approaches*. London: Sage Publications.