Measuring children’s time use in MICS

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United Nations 9th Global Forum on Gender Statistics, Johannesburg, South Africa, 29 August 2023
Why measure children’s time use?

“Before we can evaluate how well children are doing and why some are doing better than others, it is important to understand what they are doing, with whom, and in which social contexts and institutions.”

Harding (1997)
Addressing the data gaps

- Limited understanding about how the way children spend their time affects their wellbeing and shapes their opportunities
- Gender disparities in time use begin to form in childhood yet focus of time use data collection largely on adult population
- No standard data collection tools to measure children’s time use
The value of collecting time use data in MICS

Determinants

- **Individual factors** (age, sex, disability status, religion, ethnicity, marital status, educational attainment)
- **Household, environmental factors** (residence, wealth, household composition, emergency affectedness status)

Children’s time use

- **Type of activities child engages in** (sleeping, playing, schooling, socializing, etc)
- **Time allocation by activity**

Evidence-based programming

- Adolescent wellbeing
- Social protection
- Health
- Poverty alleviation
- Education
- Gender equality
- Multi-dimensional poverty
- Mental health
- Quality of life
- Health
- Educational achievement
- Quality of life

Outcomes in children’s wellbeing

- Multi-dimensional poverty
- Mental health
- Quality of life
- Health
- Educational achievement
- Quality of life

Evidence-based programming

- Adolescent wellbeing
- Social protection
- Health
- Poverty alleviation
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- Health
- Educational achievement
- Quality of life
Challenges collecting time use data in MICS

- Seasonality bias
- Limited use of time pieces in remote and low literacy areas
- Social desirability bias
- Enumerator training requirements
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<th>Challenges (cont’d): Self vs proxy reporting</th>
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<td>Is there social desirability bias when caregivers report? (e.g. under/over reporting of stigmatized/desirable activities)</td>
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<th>How accurate is caregivers reporting? Do they know what children are doing?</th>
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<th>Parents underreport girls’ domestic work (Levison 2000)</th>
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<th>Social desirability bias by proxy respondent may decrease with age (Janzen 2016)</th>
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<th>Discrepancies in time spent in paid/unpaid work, sleep and leisure</th>
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<th>Few discrepancies in time spent learning (Rost 2020)</th>
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<th>From age 8-10, most children can report on their own time (Eurostat 2016)</th>
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<th>TU instruments typically completed by caregivers of children 12 yrs. or younger and by children themselves, 13-17 yrs.</th>
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Considerations for time use data collection in MICS

Field testing

- Stylized questions vs. time diary
- Child versus caregiver reporting
- Adequacy of time use categories adapted from ICATUS 2016
- Additional respondent burden in multi-topic survey
- Low literacy, rural settings
- Enumerator training

Guiding criteria

- Relevance across diversity of settings, and for policy and programming
- Trade off between granularity and complexity of codification and training
- Getting quality data without adversely affecting overall MICS quality
# Overview of children’s time use field testing

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<tr>
<td><strong>Instrument</strong></td>
<td>Stylized questions with 2 reference periods (7 days &amp; 24 hrs.)</td>
<td>Survey-based time diary (past 24 hrs.)</td>
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<td>Adaptation of ICATUS 2016 to prioritize children’s activities</td>
<td>Adaptation of ICATUS 2016 to prioritize children’s activities</td>
<td>Further adaptation of ICATUS 2016</td>
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<td>Introduction of contextual questions</td>
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<td><strong>Sample design</strong></td>
<td>Split purposive sample of 447 households in 2 rural districts (Nkhata Bay and Balaka)</td>
<td>Probability-based sample of 680 households in 2 districts (mostly rural; urban)</td>
<td>Split purposive sample of 250 households in urban, peri-urban and rural settings in Mutare</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Respondent</strong></td>
<td>Proxy reporting by primary caregiver of children aged 5-17</td>
<td>Proxy reporting by primary caregiver of children aged 5-17</td>
<td>Self-reporting by adolescents aged 15-17 and proxy reporting by primary caregiver of adolescents aged 15-17</td>
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What have we learned?

• In general, respondents pleased to speak about their day/their child’s day
• Stylized questions & time diary
  • **Respondent fatigue** observed with stylized questions, potentially owing to cognitive burden of retrieval and aggregation
  • Diary performed better but probing needed to avoid gaps in accounting of activities
• Some difficulty collecting accurate information in low-literacy settings
  • Non-numeric responses (“a bit”, “not long” etc.) required time estimation after extensive probing
What have we learned?

Child self reporting versus care-giver proxy reporting:

• Caregivers not as able to report child’s activities and duration when child away from home

• Caregivers found it harder than children to report activities children were engaged in, even when children at home
What have we learned?

• Quality data depends on good interviewer-respondent rapport and strong interviewing skills
  • Interviewing techniques differ from typical MICS survey administration (facilitated conversation rather than scripted set of questions)
• With adequate training and practice, interviewers’ probing and activity coding skills significantly improve
• CAPI can minimize entry and estimation errors with prompts and consistency checks but can interfere with interview’s flow
• Training manuals need to be customized to provide country-relevant examples to aid in activity coding
• Sufficient time for training is critical
What have we learned?

Developing a time diary meaningful for children involved:

- **Re-classification and re-grouping** of ICATUS domain activities and introduction of **new activity labels** to prioritize children’s activities and align with UNICEF programming

- Examples - School attendance in person/remote, gaming separately from play, socialization in person/through digital technologies, social media as entertainment
  
  ➢ Tradeoff between granularity and complexity of coding and interviewers’ training

- Introduction of **contextual questions** related to homework support/tutoring, digital/online engagement associated with learning, socialization and civic participation (Zimbabwe)

- ICATUS activities adaptation and contextual questions were understood, but small samples did not capture low prevalence activities in testing locations
What’s next?

Time use module for children 10-17 yrs. now available as complementary topic in MICS7

- Direct reporting for children aged 15-17
- Proxy reporting by caregiver for children aged 10-14
- Tool package includes administration guidelines, interviewer’s instructions, protocols and ethical considerations for interviewing children
- Further methodological work to lower direct reporting for children 10-14 as well as to collect time use data for children below age 10
Thank You