**Conducting Qualitative Health Researches with Working Adolescents: Ethical Challenges**

**Abstract**

Considering the health effects of adolescent work, health professionals usually tent to conduct qualitative researching with working adolescents in order to obtain meticulous information about their experiences at work and using this data for providing care and further health policymaking. Few studies have concerned the ethical challenges of doing qualitative research with working adolescents. The current paper aims to discuss the certain ethical challenges in this field and suggested strategies to manage them, as well as, to explore our experience about a qualitative research with Iranian working adolescents. The findings of this review study showed that working adolescents are vulnerable to unequal power relationships with the adult (parents/caregivers, employer, and researchers) in the research context therefore obtaining informed consent from them might become problematic. Interviewing with working adolescents is challenging due to researchers̛ epistemological position, and might put the adolescents at risk to harm because they may disclose sensitive information about their illegal activities at work or be abused by adults. Qualitative researchers usually face ethical challenges in term of developing trust relationship and protecting working adolescents’ anonymity. Therefore qualitative researchers should adhere to the Ethic committees, use proper protocols which are developed for sensitive research topics, and ensure about applying the suitable methods and techniques to protect working adolescents before, during, and after the research. Further investigations are needed to explore the ways to empower working adolescents in a qualitative research and to balance between their protection and participation.

**Key words:** Qualitative Research, Ethical Challenges, Adolescents, Child Labour

**Introduction:**

Qualitative researches methods are utilized to explain, to clarify and elaborating the meanings of different phenomenon of human life([1](#_ENREF_1)). This research paradigm concerns with answering questions about the experiences, behaviors, interactions, and social context([2](#_ENREF_2)). Qualitative researchers operate under the different epistemological and ontological assumptions from quantitative researchers and believe that the best way to understand any phenomenon is to view it in its context. They also believe in multiple realities among researchers and participants([3](#_ENREF_3)). Considering this basis, qualitative researchers, engage in researcher-participant relationships and conversational encounters as the unique opportunity to construct understanding from the perspective of the informant([4](#_ENREF_4)).

The researcher-participant relationship becomes more complicated when adolescents involved to qualitative researches and researchers face different methodological and ethical challenges. Some of the challenges are related to the nature of researchers’ involvement in qualitative studies. According to Mauthner and Doucet (2003), researchers’ values, histories, and social location affect the multistage of a qualitative research ([5](#_ENREF_5), [6](#_ENREF_6)). Starks and Trinidad (2007) have acknowledged the role of qualitative researchers as instrument across all phases of the research project([7](#_ENREF_7)) that results in transmission of assumptions, values, interests, emotions, and theories within and across the research project([4](#_ENREF_4)).Although multiple techniques of bracketing([4](#_ENREF_4)) and reflexive journaling([5](#_ENREF_5)) are already provided by many institutes and specialists, but eventually we have to accept the inevitable effects of participants’ stories on the subjective perception of qualitative researchers. These factors result in emerge ethical dilemma in research setting and often accompany by lack of information, organizational constraints, emotive reactions and differing opinions about the right course of action([8](#_ENREF_8)).

In addition to researchers’ factors, adolescent-related factors influence the research project and may result in more complexity. Adolescents may have less experience with the research goals and process, less experience at being assertive, stating their needs and desires, asking for clarification or assistance if needed and less experience at articulating when they are uncomfortable([8](#_ENREF_8)). They also, may have difficulties to articulate their views about their experiences ([9](#_ENREF_9)). Therefore adolescents who involve in qualitative researches may be less able to foresee the reactions they might have in response to in-depth interviews. Similarly, lack of the experiences may impact upon their ability to choose not to participate in a research or even to withdraw once the research project is underway([8](#_ENREF_8)).

A number of methodological and ethical challenges arise in qualitative research with adolescents, largely because of the way adolescence is constructed and understood within specific cultural context([10](#_ENREF_10)). The degree to which adolescents should be considered as minors rather than treated as children has been raised as an ethical issue, because minors can be considered to have decision- making capabilities that children may not have([11](#_ENREF_11)). Today, adolescents who involve in research projects are considered as social actors which means that they should be involved and informed in researches ([12](#_ENREF_12)) because they typically have the cognitive capacity to make informed consent decisions([11](#_ENREF_11)). But because the researchers are bound both to protect adolescents from harms and respect their autonomy, context-specific decisions are needed and should be considered([13](#_ENREF_13)).Considering adolescents as the social actors, has created a study field with ethical dilemmas and responsibilities for researchers([12](#_ENREF_12)). The most important ethical challenges in qualitative research with adolescents are summarized as: the process of obtaining consent, adolescents’ perspectives on the research, breaching confidentiality and privacy, choosing pseudonyms, and attempts to draw out policy implication from the study([10](#_ENREF_10)).

When qualitative researchers decide to include social minority groups of adolescents in a research project as the participants, they encounter various and extra ethical challenges. Working adolescents are girls and boys aged between 10 and 19 years old who work as a child labourer ([14](#_ENREF_14)). Child labour is the work performed by children who are under the minimum age legally specified for that kind of work, or work which, because of its detrimental nature or conditions, is considered unacceptable for children/adolescent and is prohibited([15](#_ENREF_15)). When working adolescents involved in a qualitative research project, usually speak about their daily life adversities and sometimes reveal secrets or some sensitive information about their workplace or family. In the interview phase, working adolescents may speak about being abused by their employer or family members or they may disclose they are forced to do illegal activities such as stealing and drug dealing([16](#_ENREF_16)). In this case, researchers face ethical dilemmas and have to choose between their responsibilities as a human being to protect and advocate the adolescents and their commitment to confidentiality as a researcher ([17](#_ENREF_17)).

Although qualitative research with working adolescents is challenging but it is a reliable way for health professionals to obtain rigorous data about the adolescents’ health conditions. The health effects of child labour on children and adolescents who work at hazardous conditions are investigated in many researches([18](#_ENREF_18), [19](#_ENREF_19)). More than 11.7 million working adolescents aged 15 to 17 years old, usually engage in hazardous activities that affects their health([20](#_ENREF_20)). Working conditions that are safe and healthy for adults may not be safe and healthy for adolescents. Long hours of strenuous works pose a greater risk for adolescents than adults. They are vulnerable to malnutrition from inadequate food, work-related injuries, being maltreated and increasing the rate of mortality and morbidity. Considering the health effects of child labour, health professionals needed to involve qualitative researching with working adolescents in order to obtain meticulous information about their experiences at work, or daily life, and using this data for providing care and further health policymaking.

Few studies have concerned the ethical challenges which arise in qualitative researches with working adolescents. Given to the importance of conducting qualitative research with adolescents to obtain rigorous information, especially in case of working adolescents, the present review study is conducted to explore the ethical challenges in this field and the strategies which the researchers and specialists have been suggested in their published papers.

In this study, a literature review was carried out in international electronic databases including PubMed, Web of Science, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature(CINHAL), Scopus, Ebsco, EMBASE, and Google Scholar using the search terms “ qualitative research”, “working adolescent”, “child labourers”, “ child Labour”, “ethical challenges”, “ interview with adolescent”,” ethical guideline”, and ”researchers role” . these keywords were also searched on national electronic databases including Scientific Information Database(SID), Iran Medex and Medical Articles Library(Medlib) using the same search strategy.

**Child Labour: An Overview**

Child labour refers to work undertaken by children below the appropriate legal minimum working age (usually 18 years old)([21](#_ENREF_21)). International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that there are more than 168 million child labourers aged 5-17 years around the world([20](#_ENREF_20), [22](#_ENREF_22)). Asia and Pacific still has the largest numbers (almost 78 million) of child labourers but Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the region with the highest incidence ( 59 million) of child labour([22](#_ENREF_22)). At the current rates, more than 100 million children will still be trapped in child labour by 2020([23](#_ENREF_23)).  Poverty is the most common reason for child labour and while it is uncommon in developed countries, it remains a significant issue in developing countries ([24](#_ENREF_24)). Child labour has different faces and often many children don’t engage in paid employment. Households, family farms, family businesses, streets, shops, factories and workshops are child laboure workplace([14](#_ENREF_14)). Poverty, social vulnerability, problems of qualified educational access, and gender-related social pressure are the problems that result in a range of psychological and physical impacts for child labourers include breakdown of their social networks and family relationships, being abused and neglected, affecting by direct or environmental physical harm, stigmatization, and induction into crime, drug abuse, and peer exploitation ([20](#_ENREF_20), [25](#_ENREF_25)). The vulnerability of child labourers is frequently exacerbated by related factors such as health problems stemming from their premature involvement in work([20](#_ENREF_20)). The United Nation (UN) convention on the rights of the child (1989)protects children from economic exploitation and all kinds of works that are hazardous, interfere with children’s education, or consider physically, mentally, spiritually, or socially harmful([26](#_ENREF_26)). Iran has ratified the convention in 1994 and signed the both optional protocols which related to special protection of children against involvement in armed conflict, the sale of children, and sexual exploitation([27](#_ENREF_27)). Despite international and national effort focusing to reduce child labour, this problem remains unsolved in Iran. The exact number of child labourers in Iran and many other countries is impossible to quantify, but the problem of child labour is considered as one of the most important social issue in recent decades. The findings of an Iranian systematic review (2014) showed that 90% of children and adolescents who work at the streets were boy, almost 80% of them were illiterate or have had less than eight years’ education, 80% of them had a connection with their families, and at least 70% of them were afghan. They usually came from crowded, low socio-economic families and almost one-quarter of their fathers were unemployed. This study also determined near to 30% of child labourers who work at streets lived in single parent families, almost 100% of them had the experiences of violence or being maltreated. The family history of imprisonment and drug abuse was positive for participants 18.8% and 55.8% respectively([16](#_ENREF_16), [28](#_ENREF_28)). Despite suffering such adversities, working adolescents try to be resilient; they feel hopeful about their life and are confident that they can achieve what they set out to do. Their life has a sense of purpose and they have a group of close and trusted friends. Also, there is evidence of self-care, patience, empathy, and emotional insight within extremely difficult life circumstances among working adolescents([29](#_ENREF_29)).

**Research with Adolescents: The Way Adolescence Is Constructed and Understood In Research Design**

According to World Health Organization (WHO), a child is a person 19 years or younger. In WHO guidelines, when persons falls into the 10 to 19 age category, they are referred to as an adolescents([30](#_ENREF_30)). According to the WHO definition, when we use the term “child” it is cover the term “adolescent” too. considering this definition, four ways of including children and adolescents have been identified in research([12](#_ENREF_12)) which include considering them as the object, the subject, as the social actor ([31](#_ENREF_31)), and as the participants([32](#_ENREF_32), [33](#_ENREF_33)). The most traditional approach has been to see children and adolescents as the object that is as a person acted upon by others, rather than as a subject acting in the world. This approach is criticized for neglect of children’s human right and their individuality. Considering this approach, researchers investigate adolescents’ life and welfare from the perspectives of adults, usually their parents or guardians, because the adolescents are perceived as incompetent. However, the adults are not seen as having any duty to consult children or adolescents and adult-child relationships are seen in normal circumstance ([12](#_ENREF_12)) which does not reflect the reality. Considering children and adolescents as the research subject, as the second approach, is a child-centered perspective that adolescents are recognized as persons with subjectivity but their involvement in research is conditioned by judgments about their cognitive abilities and social competencies. In fact, adolescents’ developmental status and maturity are considered as inclusion criteria ([12](#_ENREF_12), [34](#_ENREF_34), [35](#_ENREF_35)). In the third approach (seeing the child or adolescent as a social actor) adolescents are seen to act, take part in, change and become changed by the social and cultural world they live in. Therefore they are no longer seen solely as part of their family or social and it does not take any distinction between them and other adults for granted. Considering this approach, researchers must employ the suitable method for particular participants in a specific social and cultural context ([12](#_ENREF_12), [31](#_ENREF_31)). Currently following to develop the third perspective, the forth perspective has been introduced to the research paradigm and children and adolescents are seen as active participants , as they are in societal life, in the research process ([32](#_ENREF_32)). The forth perspective has support in United Nations (UN) convention on the right of child that emphasizes all activities that affect children’s lives have to build on seeing children as flow human beings. From this perspective, children and adolescents are understood to play a significant role in shaping and being shaped by the social world([8](#_ENREF_8), [36](#_ENREF_36)) and should be involved, informed, consulted and heard([12](#_ENREF_12)).

Adolescence has been shown to be an important developmental period from which to understand engagement risky health behavior ([13](#_ENREF_13)).In order to affect change and promoting adolescents’ health, it is crucial to understand various important health issues, and to identify factors that impact their health behaviors. Qualitative researches allow researchers to develop a deeper understanding of health related topics among adolescents and to identify their attitudes, beliefs, and preferences. Adolescents are the best source to obtain valid data, therefore qualitative data should be obtained from the adolescents rather than seeking data about the adolescents([36](#_ENREF_36), [37](#_ENREF_37)).

**Doing Qualitative Research with working adolescents: Ethical Challenges**

Qualitative research with working adolescents, which researchers focus on the lives experiences and views of the adolescents about their health conditions, raise a number of critical issues and challenges. Ethical matters such as informed consent, access, relationships, confidentiality, and protection are fundamental in all qualitative researches([1](#_ENREF_1)), but in research with working adolescents these take on an extra substance because working adolescents are vulnerable. Vulnerability is the first conclusion a qualitative researcher make when doing a research with children and adolescents. A judgment about child and adolescents vulnerability is based on the capacity for self-protection. ([38](#_ENREF_38)). Self-protection refers to being able to demonstrate behavior that results in defending oneself against threats of safety and successfully meeting one’s own basic needs([39](#_ENREF_39)). Working adolescents are usually neglected by their parents or social systems([40](#_ENREF_40)) and have not the adequate resources to learn self-protection behaviors. They feel powerlessness in their relationships with adults([29](#_ENREF_29)) and they are known as vulnerable persons in many studies([41](#_ENREF_41)). Restrictive definition of vulnerability in research can be roughly described as context-based, harm- based, or comprehensive ([42](#_ENREF_42)). Therefore ethical consideration should be included in research with those participants who are relatively or absolutely incapable of protecting their own interests, or are considered as vulnerable participants by researchers or Ethic Committees based on their contextual context.

Here we discuss ethical challenges and the suggested ethical considerations in qualitative health research with working adolescents:

*Relations and interactions*

Qualitative researchers usually are in a close and often long-term relationship with the participants. This relationship can become complicated when working adolescents involved because they are potentially more vulnerable to unequal power relationships with the adult researcher than other groups. Unequal power usually exists in term of age, status, competency and experience([38](#_ENREF_38)). The developmental nature of the research process([43](#_ENREF_43)), on the other hand, leads to change in power relations which pose specific ethical issues to the researcher. When qualitative researchers try to persuade potential participants to participate in the research and share their personal experiences and perspectives, the amount and quality of information offered regarding the research are entirely at their discretion. The researchers who are in possession of information about the study, and the participants who own the knowledge and experience needed to perform the study, can use their respective powers to negotiate the level of information provided about the study([44](#_ENREF_44)). In the case of qualitative research with working adolescents, researchers involve negotiation with parents or guardians as well as adolescents that have the potential to change the power relations between all individual involved. Working adolescents usually, experience power imbalance in their relationships with parents, guardians or employers([29](#_ENREF_29)). In such a situation, they perceive the adults as an authority figure, and consequently try to please them for fear of the reaction if they don’t([45](#_ENREF_45), [46](#_ENREF_46)). Power relations pose specific ethical issues in other research stages include data collection, data analysis and production of the report. For example, during data collection stage, qualitative researchers seem to be entirely dependent on the participants’ willingness to take part in the research and to share their experiences. Therefore the quantity and quality of data shared with researchers depend in part on the relationship between researchers and participants([44](#_ENREF_44)) which may results working adolescents being under pressure to share their experiences with researchers. Several methods are applied by researchers to protect their own professional ethics and to demonstrate their respects for participants. These methods are presented in table 1.

**Table 1: Methods for Qualitative Researchers to Protect Their Own Professional Ethics (Karnieli-Miller & Strier, 2009)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Before the research*** | * Thoroughly examine the goals and reasons underlying the study * Examine the researchers̛ personal commitment to the studied population and ensure that is includes an obligation to do no harm * Increase the familiarity with the study population by learning their culture and history (Few, Stephen,& Rouse-Arnett,2003) * Commit to present the study and its aim in clear and open way(Bravo-Moreno,2003) * Provide information about the expected distribution of the knowledge developed in the study * Protect privacy and anonymity (Bravo-Moreno,2003) |
| ***During the research*** | * Make meticulous use of language tailored to the interviewee’s capabilities and life experience (Few et al.,2003) * Show awareness of the developing power relation during the interview, and provide open communication that allows criticism of the research and of the method, even in the course of the interview(Bravo-Moreno,2003) * Make sure the participants have the right and the opportunity to object(Brinkmann&Kvale,2005) * Give reminders, especially during intimate portions of interview, about the nature of the study and its publication * Commit to the principle of justice by continuously making sure that there is a fair distribution between the benefits experienced by the participants and the burden they experience (Kahn, Mastrioanni, & Sugarman,1998) * Conduct verification interviews at various stages of the study to confirm the researchers̛ understanding of the information collected and the right to use it(Enosh&Buchbinder,2005;Lincoln&Guba,1985) |
| ***After the study*** | * Check and recheck the researchers̛ obligation to the study population, which includes sincere concern not to hurt the participants * Do not distort the meaning of the participants̛ voices * Avoid presenting only the researcher’s voice(Marcus&Fisher,1986), and be clear about which voice is represented * Protect the anonymity of participants(Seldman,1991) * Acknowledge the strength of the groups * Use the participants̛ own language in writing * Provide “thick description” of the context, the process, and your own values and experiences that played a role in the interpretation and presentation of data(Brinkmann&Kvale,2005) * Use reflexivity to be transparent and accountable for the methodologies and their limitation * Represent the influencing factors, such as the researchers̛ values, norms, and institutional pressure, that play a role in interpreting and writing the findings(Malacrida,2007) |

*Informed consent*

Consent to participate in research needs to be gained before any collection of personal data. Prior to undertaking research in which adolescents are participants, it may require several layers of permissions from gatekeepers (parents or caregivers) and adolescents. Consent arrangement is depend on various factors include: the age and/or vulnerability of participating adolescent, the nature of the research burden on participant, the methodology employed; and the sensitivity of the subject([47](#_ENREF_47)).When working adolescents are asked to give informed consent they must be given enough information in language understandable to them([38](#_ENREF_38)). Consent to participate in research can only be meaningful if provided on an informed basis. It is the researchers’ responsibility not only to provide relevant information about the research itself, and what participation will entail, but also to ensure that this is understood by the adolescent([47](#_ENREF_47)).The processes of obtaining inform consent might become problematic for several reasons, the most important of which is power inequity between the adults and adolescents([48](#_ENREF_48)). Studies conducted with working adolescents are also distinctive in regard to the informed consent of a third person, usually parents, caregivers or/and the employers, who decide if the adolescents are given the choice to decide if they want to participate or not([38](#_ENREF_38)). It is essential to ensure that the working adolescent understands the negative as well as positive consequences of consenting to participation in the research process. Potential participants also, need to understand their right to refuse participating without adverse consequences, and to answer specific questions without having to give reasons([47](#_ENREF_47)).In order to ensure a full understanding amongst potential participants, the researchers will often need to supplement verbal explanations with diagrams and/or appropriately written short texts. Time should be allowed for adolescents to reflect on the consequences of participating the research and to consult guardians, other adults, or friends should they wish([49](#_ENREF_49)). The most important issue regarding to obtain informed consent is that a considerable number of working adolescents have not accessed to trustworthy adults([16](#_ENREF_16)) therefore researchers should take every measure to identify trusted adults and solicit their views on the feasibility of the research and on obtaining their consent. In some cases, the identification of trusted adults could be done through working adolescents themselves, in other cases through focus group discussion and key informant interviews([49](#_ENREF_49)). Researchers also should provide their name and contact details for adolescents and their families([47](#_ENREF_47)) to facilitate the process of obtaining informed consent.

*The matter of trust*

Developing trust between researchers and participants has been considered as the most important research issue that facilitate access to hard -to-reach vulnerable groups. The position of the researchers as an outsider is considered important in applying the methods to build trust in the researcher-participant relationship because the degree of social separation between researchers and their study population is characterized by distrust that raises a range of concerns([50](#_ENREF_50)). According to researches findings, empathy with participants([51](#_ENREF_51)) and credibility of the researcher([52](#_ENREF_52)) are two suggested ways to develop trust between researchers and participants. There is also, another suggestion by researches to establish trust between interviewer and interviewee; feminist researches has tried to combat an unequal power balance by promoting interactive interviews in which the researchers self-disclose along with the interviewee ([53](#_ENREF_53)). This strategy helps establish trust because both people ( researcher and participant) are revealing things about themselves([54](#_ENREF_54)).When working adolescents included in qualitative researches, the process of obtaining rigorous data is highly affected by trust in the adolescents-researcher relationship. Working adolescents have many stories to tell and the researchers should decide applying appropriate method to making trust and generating reliable information. The most important problem in research with working adolescents is that the standard setting for doing research with children and adolescents such as classrooms or worksites, may not be optimum qualitative researchers to develop trust relationships and to obtain the real stories from working adolescents([49](#_ENREF_49)). Qualitative researchers are recommended to set the interviews venue at the neutral settings that is preferred by adolescents ([47](#_ENREF_47)) because they feel safe and comfortable. Researches with working adolescents have demonstrated that they could not, sometimes under any circumstance, be asked to participate in interview in their workplaces, because they prefer their employer or friends don’t present and don’t feel safety at their workplaces. Therefore it is essential that working adolescents be given the choice to decide upon the interview place and condition and to have the support of the researchers as necessary([49](#_ENREF_49)). Qualitative researchers also are recommended to develop of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organization before the first data collection dialogue take place([55](#_ENREF_55)). This strategy which is mentioned by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as “ *prolonged engagement*” between the qualitative researchers and the participants([56](#_ENREF_56)), is apply in order to gain an adequate understanding of an organization and to establish a relationship of trust between the researcher and participant([55](#_ENREF_55)). Active listening to the adolescents in the interview is another strategy that is useful to establish trust in researcher-participant relationships. There seems to be a tendency among adults to ignore or misinterpret views and perceptions expressed by working adolescents, especially in situation where the researcher feels that the views and perceptions put forward by the adolescents are not directly relevant to the research goals. Therefore, the researcher should listen to the concerns and issues raised, even when these may not seem immediately pertinent to the initial research objectives([49](#_ENREF_49)).

*Child labour as a sensitive research topic: the roles of Ethic Committees to ensure participants’ safety*

The definition of a *sensitive research topic* is dependent on both context and cultural norms and values([57](#_ENREF_57)). Consequently, there are many definitions of sensitive research, ranging from those studies that refer to the topics that encompass the whole of research activity, including its implications for practice and the wider research community([58](#_ENREF_58)). Raymond LEE (1993) cited in McCosker et al. (2001) suggested there are three issues that create a concern about sensitivity. The first of these issues are those considered private, stressful, or scared (intrusive threat) such as sexual abuse or death. The second are those issues that if reveals might cause stigmatization or fear (threat of sanction), such as the studies about adolescents that reveal illegal behavior. The third issues are related to the presence of a political threat where researchers may study areas subject to controversy or social conflict([57](#_ENREF_57), [58](#_ENREF_58)). Considering these classifications as well as the nature of child labour that is laden to sensitive issues such as illegal activities, abuse, and stressful work environment([22](#_ENREF_22)), many researches about working adolescents are categorized as the sensitive research. Sensitive researches usually are highlighted potential psychological, emotional, physical, and spiritual risks that are associated potentially with the interviewees as the participant([57](#_ENREF_57)), thus the Ethic Committees as advisors, have considerable positive role to minimize potential harm, protect participants from paternalism, anticipate potential risks and, if necessary, request to pose solutions or alternations to the researches([57](#_ENREF_57), [59](#_ENREF_59)).Ethic committee has the responsibility of considering the psychological safety of interviewees to be of paramount importance during the research process. Also, a clear protocol often is suggested by research committee to respond the potential risks that the interview may cause the participants ([57](#_ENREF_57)). To ensure participants’ physical safety, there should be a clear protocol or safety plan which includes assessment of different aspects of participation in the research activity. For instance, the researchers should be asked by ethic committee to answer the questions such as “*what is the nature of the phenomenon and does the researcher have a background to appropriately undertake the research?* “And “*what is the nature of environment (context) in which the data will be collected?*” ([60](#_ENREF_60)). Researchers may be guided by the Ethic Committee to recruit and contact participants through safe mechanism, to set the interview time and venue in a safe place, to check the environment prior to an interview, to develop an awareness of personal safety (for example through sharing the list of the names of interviewees with other research team member), and to evaluate and changing the program if needed([57](#_ENREF_57)). There is a need to be clear about the psychological safety of participants involved the qualitative research. From the perspective of the interviewees this may require the researcher to assume a counselling role within an interview([61](#_ENREF_61)). Strategies may include giving the interviewees time to cry or expose significant emotions and acknowledging the importance of this to the well-being of the participants([57](#_ENREF_57)). To protect participants psychologically, Researchers should be aware of what they know and how they feel about the situation and the participants stories. Qualitative researchers are encouraged to develop their reflexivity because researchers̛ epistemological position, their values and norms can affect the way that, interviews are conducted, the text are read and coded, and research participants̛ narratives are represented in the writing up of research data([6](#_ENREF_6), [62](#_ENREF_62)). These all should be supervised by Ethic Committees and qualitative researchers themselves to ensure participants’ safety. Qualitative researchers who conduct research with working adolescents should be aware of the sensitive nature of the research and adhere to the recommendations are made by the Ethic Committees. They also, should consider the working adolescents’ preferences such as don’t talking about issues that are too sensitive or using local language. Qualitative researchers, as a result, should avoid of using technical terms, abbreviations, and abstractions in interviews and respect the right of a child to remain silent on issues too sensitive to talk about and do not ignore concern and issues raised by the working adolescent in interview. Researchers also should combine open-ended and closed questions, do not express disappointment if working adolescents do not tell them the truth, and they should resist experiences of shock([49](#_ENREF_49)).

*Protection and responsibility for do not harm*

When conducting research on adolescents’ lives at work or other daily experiences, there is always a danger that the working adolescents that participate in the research may be put at risk due to their marginalized position in society and their vulnerability. Therefore, researchers have a responsibility to ensure that no harm will befall working adolescents as a result of their participation in the research process([49](#_ENREF_49)).The principal of “no harm” to participants ought to be considered by researchers, who should be aware of potential harms that might be inflicted upon study subjects([1](#_ENREF_1)). One way of protecting working adolescents from being hurt is to solicit views and consent from their parents/caregivers or employers, whenever that is an appropriate and safe thing to do. Casper (2003) have developed a checklist based on previous investigations (Alderson, 1995;Roberts, 2000) in the field of child protection in research([49](#_ENREF_49)) which is useful to protect working adolescents in research process. The checklist is presented in table2.

**Table 2: Child and Adolescent Protection from Research’s Harm And Risks: A Checklist (Casper, 2003)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***The purpose of the research*** | * If the research findings are meant to benefit certain children? * Who are they, and how might they benefit? |
| ***Researching with children: costs and hoped for benefits*** | * Might there be risks or costs such as time, inconvenience, embracement, intrusion of privacy, sense of failure or coercion, fear of admitting anxiety? |
| ***Privacy and confidentiality*** | * When significant extracts from interviews are quoted in reports, should researchers first check the quotations and commentary with the child (parents) concerned? |
| ***Selection, inclusion and exclusion*** | * Have some children been excluded because, for instance, they have speech or learning difficulties? * Can the exclusion be justified? |
| ***Funding*** | * Should the research founds be raised only from agencies which avoid activities that can harm children? |
| ***Review and revision of the research aims and methods*** | * Have children or their caregivers helped to plan or commented on the research? |
| ***Information for children, parents and other caregivers*** | * Are the children and adults concerned given details about the purpose and nature of the research, the methods and timing, and the possible benefits, harms and outcomes? |
| ***Consent*** | * Do children know that if they refuse or withdraw from the research, this will not be held against them in any way? * How do the researchers help children to know these things? |
| ***Dissemination*** | * Will the children and adults involved be sent short reports of the main findings? |
| ***Impact on children*** | * Besides the effects of the research on the children involved, how might the conclusions affects larger groups of children? |

*The right to privacy*

As in research with informant adults, the data which is provided to researchers by children and adolescents should be treated as confidential([38](#_ENREF_38)). Protecting anonymity in the form of removing names and other identifying information must be strictly adhered to, and should be explained to working adolescents participating in the research process. The special circumstances when qualitative researchers might feel it necessary to break confidentiality would include those in which working adolescents are considered to be in danger ([49](#_ENREF_49)). For example whenever a research project is focused on a very specific target group, such as research on sexual abuse of adolescents working in the streets, it can be very difficult to protect the anonymity of the adolescents participating in the research. It is recommended that the sample size be enlarged to include a wider target population with a variety of adolescents ([13](#_ENREF_13), [49](#_ENREF_49), [57](#_ENREF_57)).

**Conclusion**

Currently flowing to develop the ways of including children and adolescents in researches, they are seen as social actors and are understood to play a significant role in shaping and being shaped by the social world. Qualitative researches with adolescents are a challenging but reliable way to obtain valid data about their health conditions and daily life experiences. Engaging the qualitative research with social minority groups of adolescents ,such as working adolescents, is a challenging research experience for both the researchers and children and raises specific and extra ethical dilemmas that warrant special attention. Working adolescents are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and many other threats in their daily life and they also are vulnerable to unequal power relationships with the adult in the research context. Obtaining informed consent from working adolescents might become problematic because of power inequity between adults and adolescents. Also, in this process, researchers need to obtain informed consent from adolescents’ parents/caregivers, or employers too. The most important issue regarding obtain informed consent is that working adolescents may have not access to trustworthy adults. Interviewing with working adolescents is challenging because researchers̛ epistemological position, their values and norms can affect the way that interviews are conducted and coded. Another considerable issue is researchers̛ emotional responses, such as guilty, angry, and shock, about the participants̛ stories to the data.

To deal with ethical challenges in qualitative research with working adolescents, some solutions are suggested. Researchers should examine the goals and reasons underlying the study before the research and should be aware of what they know and how they feel about the situation. Also, they should get familiar with research cultural context and identify trusted adults and solicit their views on the feasibility of the research and on obtaining their consent. During conducting a qualitative research with working adolescents, researchers should use understandable language, listen carefully to what participants say, commit the principles of *justice* and *no harm*, and conduct verifying interviews if needed. In the case of protecting working adolescents, researchers should not distort the meaning of participants̛ voice and they are obligate to protect the participants̛ anonymity and privacy. Researchers should check and recheck their obligation to the study population, which includes sincere concern not to hurt the participants. Qualitative researchers who involved research with adolescent labourers should always be aware that there are risks or costs such as time, inconvenience, embracement and intrusion of privacy, sense of failure or coercion and fear of admitting anxiety in this kind of researches. As a whole, qualitative researchers should adhere to the Ethic Committee and specific protocol which are developed for protecting participants ethically in sensitive researchers.

Considering the aforementioned, further investigations are needed to explore other aspects of ethical challenges in qualitative research with working adolescents as well as to develop meticulous and explicit ethical guidelines in this field.

**Declaration of interest statement**

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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