Work Package 3 workshop approaches and wider Hub Research.

Work Package 3 Working Paper Series

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1   Introduction

This survey was conducted to evaluate and understand how activities being conducted in WP3 workshops are applied across the Hub. The study sought to explore the extent and ways the discussions and insights from WP3 activities have shaped, however slightly, the research in the other work packages. We wanted to find out how researchers across the Hub have incorporated approaches from WP3 workshops into their ongoing research and which features of these approaches proved especially useful. Understanding these dynamics is important in shaping future engagements within WP3 and in positioning the Innovation Lab in such a way as to be effectively connected with other work packages. It is also important to us to understand the take-up of the creative approaches to intervention explored in the WP across the Hub.

The survey also explored how risk can be defined for adolescents within African contexts – a key theme emerging from workshop 1. Working with a clear definition is key in how we position ourselves as researchers. This is especially important as we test interventions that have a bearing on people whose lived experience might not be immediately familiar to us. In that vein, the survey sought to understand how researchers might be rethinking and revising their positions as they interact with adolescents.

This brief report provides a summary of the findings from the survey that was carried out between 9 April and 16 May 2020. The survey questionnaire was developed through iterative interactions between the three team members of WP3 that started off on 23 March 2020 with the final version being completed on 1 April 2020. The survey was carried out on Qualtrics and was accessible through a link that was distributed electronically to all Hub members (researchers and project managers alike). A total of 33 responses were received. There were 18 complete responses whose data could be used in the analysis. The quantitative data was analysed on Qualtrics, using descriptive frequencies. The qualitative data (from the text responses received) was thematically analysed before generating the report.

2   Findings

2.1   Work package workshops

2.1.1   Workshop attendance
Fifty-five percent of the respondents indicated that they had attended WP3 workshops of which about half of these had attended Workshop 1 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Workshop attendance

2.1.2   Incorporated ideas from the workshops into currents studies

An encouraging 52% reported that they had incorporated ideas from the workshops into their ongoing research (Figure 2). As indicated in Table 1, the ideas and approaches that were incorporated included: more direct consultation with adolescents; the use of immersion techniques to help assist with perspective taking; and using poems and prose pieces as exploratory tools in talking about our lives. There was also the significant ongoing approach of exploring the stories adolescents tell about themselves and comparing these to perceptions or narratives that people have about adolescents.
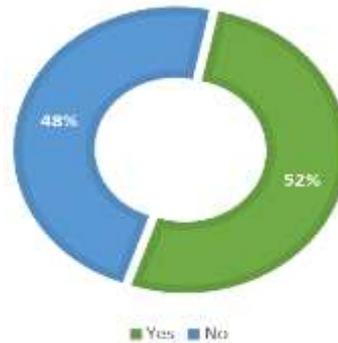

Figure 2: Incorporated idea into current studies

Table 1: How ideas influenced current research

Idea incorporated	How it influenced current research/work
Direct consultations with adolescents	• Refining approach by delivering health education to smaller groups where adolescents feel free to express themselves
Immersion techniques & group discussions	• Used in group work with students • Helped in understanding constructs and the theories of construction of adolescence
Perceptions on adolescents	• Incorporated into WP1 policy impact work
Poems and other creative writing	• Planning a Hub wide meeting • Design of the Community Care follow up questionnaire
Novel participatory approaches	• Co-hosted a seminar at UCT
Digital programmes and gender	• Incorporated into PLH Digital

2.1.3   Using immersion strategies

In workshop 1 we asked participants to talk about themselves as adolescents. We found that this exercise played a major role in framing subsequent discussions. By recalling their own adolescence, a number of participants reported that they shifted to a more understanding view of today's adolescents. About 37% of the respondents have at one point used immersion tools in their research, inspired by their use in workshop 1, with 42% indicating that they will continue to use these tools (Figure 3). The immersion tools used include but are not limited to (*i) focus group discussion guides and role play, (ii) words to describe yourself as an adolescent and (iii) listening to and looking for the views of adolescents.* Immersion strategies have mainly been used in designing interventions (27%) and developing parenting topics (27%) in the Hub (Figure 4).
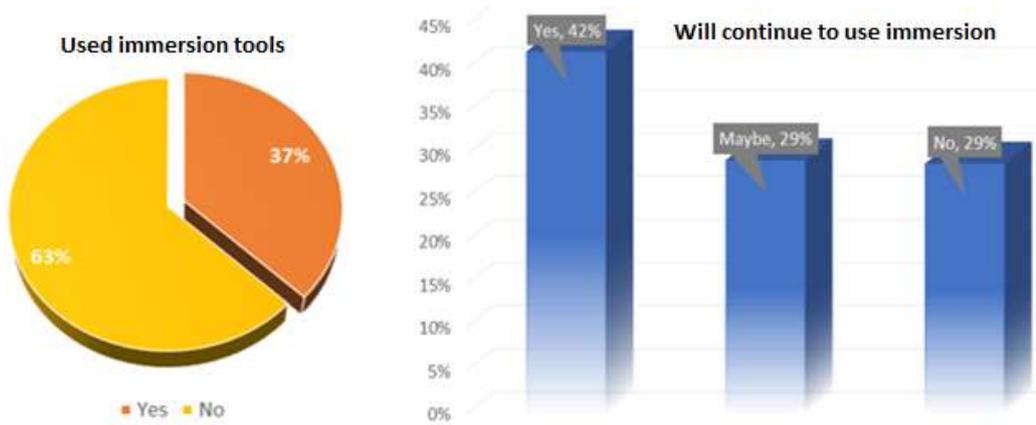
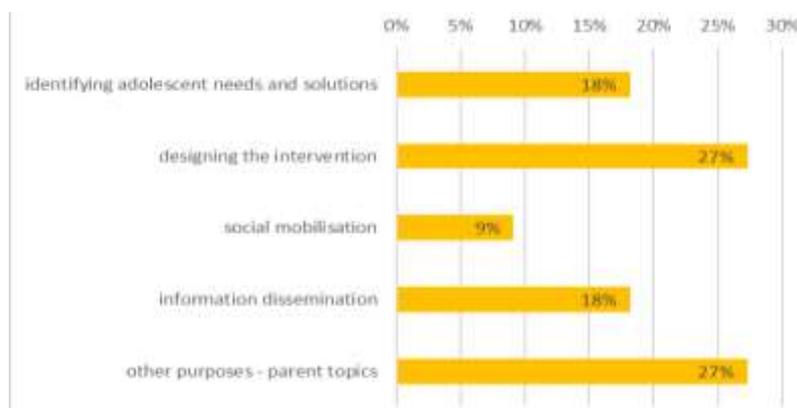*Figure 3: Using immersion strategies in their studies.*

Figure 4: Application of immersion within the Hub

2.2 Risk in the adolescent period

Understanding the possibility of positive risk taking may have implications for intervention design. Social discourse about adolescence characterizes it as a period of risk taking with destructive effects. In our workshops, several widely divergent understandings of the relationship between risk and adolescence emerged. For some, risk was dangerous, costly, and to be avoided. For others, risk stimulated creativity, pushed boundaries and was one of the leading positive features of adolescence. A key conclusion of workshop 1 was that discussions related to adolescents and risk often start with the assumption that risk taking in this life stage is a bad thing, yet it need not always be. A more nuanced, open understanding of risk, or recklessness, kept resurfacing in our discussions as a provocative and productive area of further inquiry. The following responses capture how researchers within the Hub frame and understand risk in adolescence.

2.2.1 Risky behaviour in African adolescents

More than 76% of the respondents defined risky behaviour in African adolescents as including social openness, engaging in unprotected sex due to socio-economic challenges, peer pressure and migration in search for better livelihoods (Figure 4).
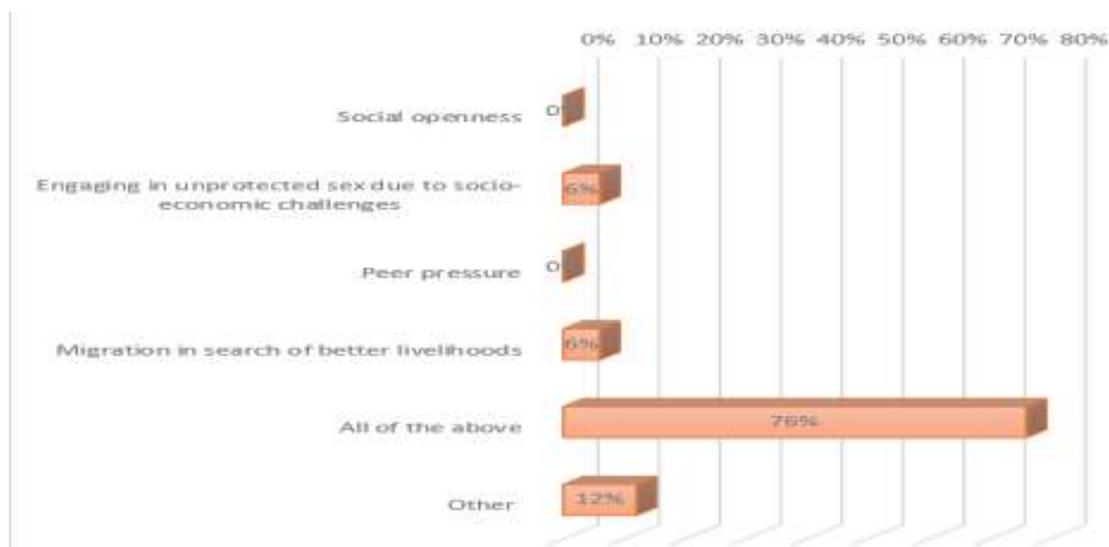
Figure 5: Risk behaviour in African adolescents

2.2.2 Characterisations of risk within adolescence

The respondents were asked how discourses from Accelerate Hub research characterized the adolescence stage in terms of risk taking. About 83% agreed with the statement that it was a period of a *"positive kind of experimentation that explores boundaries and devises better ways of coping with challenges"* (Table 2).

Table 2: The characterisation of risk amongst adolescents

Reckless and has largely destructive effects	**6%**
Positive kind of experimentation that explores boundaries and devises better ways of coping with challenges	**83%**
Positive kind of experimentation that involves better ways of getting on with one another	**11%**

2.2.3 Redefining risk for adolescents

All respondents agreed with the statement that, *redefining risk as a positive developmental aspect in some contexts stimulates creative interventions more attuned to the qualities of adolescence* (Table 3).

Table 3:Redefining risk as a positive developmental aspect

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
35%	65%	0%	0%	0%

Different viewpoints were raised that related to defining/redefining risk as a positive developmental aspect. As one respondent noted, we *"should look and acknowledge risk-taking as a normal developmental stage, but also recognize that risk-taking is exacerbated by social and environmental factors, which need to be addressed"*. Adolescents are bound to take risks, it is in their nature as they are learning more about themselves. As one respondent aptly put it, "*risk is an important element of establishing independence*". From these different viewpoints two important conclusions emerged: risk can be positive or negative; to understand the implications of risk taking, you must pay attention to the environment in which the risky behaviour occurs.

Beginning with the premise that risk can be positive or negative (that is, it is not always bad) may improve interactions with young people. It can lead to changes in attitude and openness from both the researcher and the adolescents. This in turn may lead to more co-creative problem-solving, which adolescents could identify with: the underlying messages will be open and less judgmental. Not considering risk as a positive developmental aspect may lead us to taking a penalizing approach to it.

Risk, positive and negative, is shaped by context. As one respondent pointed out, *"It is difficult given the current context of our research, to see how unprotected sex and drug use are good for African adolescents."* There was also consensus that risk is context-specific and should therefore be redefined within those boundaries. *"Some of the risks taken by adolescents may be beneficial if re-defined within the context they are taken.* For example*,"risk associated with peer pressure and cyberbullying may be re-defined"* by understanding the context within which it is experienced. Doing so can lead to the designing of interventions that prevent negative consequences of such risk-taking behaviour rather than mitigate the outcomes, to paraphrase a respondent. In other words, how do we prevent the negative consequences of peer pressure when it comes to say drug abuse or engaging in sex at an early age?

2.3   Questioning our own positions as researchers

Given the cultural and contextual differences between many of the researchers' backgrounds (both socially and geographically) and the adolescents the Hub works with, it is important to reflect on how our particular conceptions of adolescent life influence how we design our research. In short, how does this subject influence our research practice? In this regard, researchers were asked to reflect on their position in relation to the adolescents who are the main subject of this project. Eighty-three per cent of the respondents concurred that "research about African adolescents in particular require us to ask more testing questions of our own positions as researchers" (Figure 5).
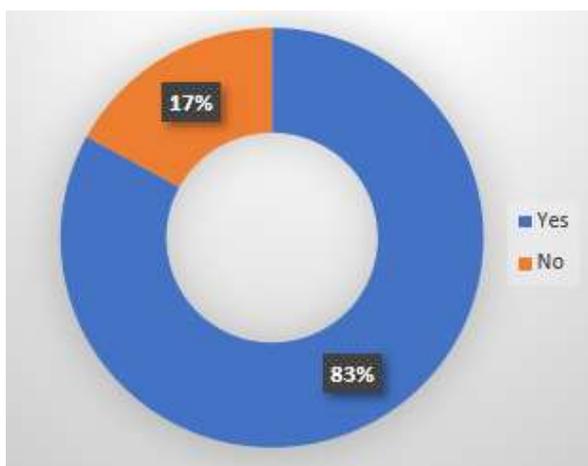

Figure 6: Questioning our own position as researchers

As reported by the respondents, researchers engaged in these questions at different stages of the research process and by using different methodologies. Some researchers included self-reflection in the research questionnaires they set up whilst others went through processes of self-reflection as part of their research in which they tried to look *"for positives - seeking out measures that are positive (such as hope) rather than the absence of negative"*. For others self-reflection was introduced through

teen advisory groups, reading and critical thinking groups as well as through study designs. As pointed out by one respondent, "*everyone has an agenda - in research and otherwise - and it is important for us to say out loud what ours is and then review it critically*". Another pointed out that it was also important for researchers to reflect and pose questions such as the following: *"How do power dynamics and different socio-economic positions influence my understanding of challenges facing adolescents and their interaction with me? Is my (potentially ongoing) interaction with adolescents as a researcher influencing their responses (social desirability) or the way they see the world?"* As another respondent noted, such self-awareness helped them "*into being more aware of my own position in any group interaction ... [this] [gave] me some confidence in talking openly about that position*".

3 Conclusions

The findings show that the WP3 workshops were well received within the Hub. Those who gleaned ideas and tools from the workshops have gone on to use them in their research. Some of the tools used such as immersion and direct engagement with adolescents have led to changes to the initial study design.

The understanding of risk within African contexts was also confirmed to be important in our intervention development. As indicated by the findings, risk is context specific and understanding the environment within which this risk is taken can provide or shape solutions that address the risk-fuellers. Risk-taking in certain cases may also be good for personal development. There is evidence that framing the positive developmental aspects of risk helps researchers connect with adolescents and disinclines us to be judgemental. More understanding of the Hub's focus demographic group can be brought about by this positive perspective of risk as well as through a critical repositioning of our own views of adolescents.

Going forward, it will be expedient to use some of the tools emanating from the WP3 workshops whilst also inviting more participants from within the Hub to future events. There is also need to bring more adolescents into the research space so that a deeper understanding of their lived experiences is captured and their ideas incorporated into ongoing research. It is in this way that we will develop refined and appropriate SDG accelerators.