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## ETHICS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INVOLVING STREET CHILDREN

### Etyka w jakościowych badaniach angażujących dzieci ulicy

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#### Abstract

Research involving children renders numerous doubts, problems, and questions. Furthermore, many of such issues remain unresolved. On the other hand, research involving children can be a fascinating adventure into their world. They are very useful, and help to create relations between adults and children, and what is more help children without big interference in their private life. In this article, I reflect upon the research process\* from the perspective of research ethics and ethical issues concerning children. My aim is to delve into difficulties, but also opportunities that accompany the researchers working with children. The article aims to inspire researchers who want to conduct research involving children. It shows how to cope with some ethical issues which researchers may face.

**Keywords:** research involving children, research ethics, street children/children on the street.

#### Streszczenie

Badania prowadzone wśród dzieci dostarczają wiele wątpliwości, problemów i pytań. Niestety, wiele takich problemów pozostaje nierozwiązanych. Z drugiej strony badania z udziałem dzieci mogą być fascynującą przygodą w ich świat. Są bardzo pożyteczne, gdyż pomagają tworzyć relacje między dorosłymi a dziećmi, gdy nie ingerują za bardzo w ich życie prywatne. W poniższym artykule dokonuję refleksji nad procesem badawczym\* z perspektywy etyki i problemów etycznych dotyczących dzieci. Moim celem jest zagłębianie się w trudności, ale także w możliwości towarzyszące badaczom pracującym z dziećmi. Artykuł może być inspiracją dla wszystkich, którzy chcą prowadzić badania z udziałem dzieci. Artykuł pokazuje, jak radzić sobie z niektórymi kwestiami etycznymi, które mogą spotkać badacza angażującego dzieci w badania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** badania angażujące dzieci, etyka w badaniach, dzieci ulicy/ dzieci na ulicy.

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\* Regarding the research project about street children/children on the street elaborated by Zdanowicz-Kucharczyk (2012).

## Introduction

In this article, I am discussing some difficulties and opportunities arising from considerations regarding research involving children. I rely on my own experiences from a research project about street children/children on the street (Zdanowicz-Kucharczyk, 2012). According to autobiography (Bochner & Ellis, 1999), I use my own experiences as a source to describe the culture of street children's lives that I have researched. Street children/children on the street are a specific group. However, the ethical dilemmas that I came across in my project, concern not only research with street children/children on the street, but could be relevant to any projects involving children. All research involving children may struggle with limitations related to funding, resources, interpersonal power dynamics, and the wider management context. In this text, I recall Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) by Graham, Powell, Taylor, Anderson & Fitzgerald (2013). I discuss how the main ethic clues, which the report mention, have led me through my research project, and how I responded to the various doubts and dilemmas that I met.

During my research project, I used documentary method (Krzychała, 2004) as a main methodological approach. I was looking for the methodology that could help me to enter to the street children's world. The documentary method opens up different possibilities to meet research participant: the observation, photo reports, and group discussions. The observation could be a good beginning, but I wanted to extend the choice of methods. I was drawn to the idea of taking photos and talking to natives, and realized that I should broaden my techniques using those activities. Photo elicitation turned out very helpful to encourage children to participate in the research. It also helped me to notice things about the street children environment that were typically invisible to other adults.

I conducted my research in a city in the north of Poland with children from the child-care institution. In spite of the care provided at the institution, those children often escaped to the streets and spent their time there. Before the project started, I spent six months with those children as a volunteer. I was having fun with them, doing everyday activities. I helped them with their homework. I listened to them when they had wanted to talk. I tried to become a part of their reality. It helped me to gain their trust. In that way, they had known me before I invited them to the project, during which they would photograph their street environment.

The project work consisted of three stages:

1. *City tour and photographing of selected places by children.* I asked children to go with me to the city and to take photos wherever they wanted to.
2. *Watching photos and choosing the most interesting ones.* I showed children all photos and we chose the most interesting ones according to them.

3. *Making photographic reportages by children.* We made photographic reportages about their life on the street on huge sheets of paper. During this activity we also had group discussion. Children were making reportages and talking about their motivation to present these photos and what do these places mean to them. I let the children to lead me in their life.

It has been almost 10 years since I conducted my first research project with street children. This article is my reflection about my experiences of working with children as research participants. I write about my doubts, decisions, and how I resolved the ethical dilemmas that appeared during the research project.

### **1. Ethics in research involving children**

In the 1990's of the XX century researchers started to be more interested in children's participation in the research. It has been noticed how much the children's perspective can be different from adult's point of view. The belief that children need to be invited to participate in research in order to learn about their world has become widespread (Davis et al., 2006). James & Prout (1997) have contributed to spreading the paradigm of treating the child as a research subject, and not just as an incomplete version of adults. The methodology for research with children has been extended (Punch, 2002; Vaele, 2005; Warming, 2011, Zwiernik, 2012), and consequently, ethical dilemmas began to arise regarding the children's participation.

Ethics in research explains and helps researchers to respect research participants, throughout each research study by referring to commonly accepted standards. Ethics standards are also protective for researchers and their institutions (Alderson & Morrow, 2020, p. 6). To conduct ethical research involving children, researchers have at their disposal several legal and research ethics advisory bodies that aim at guiding and providing support to those involved in research with children. The Convention On The Rights Of The Child helps researchers to explain a lots of ethical dilemmas. For example, Article 12 emphasizes the importance of giving children a voice in all matters concerning children, and Article 13 lifts up the right to freedom of expression, which shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice (Convention on the Rights of the Child). Further, researchers, relying on articles of Convention and their own research experiences, provide many interesting frames that elaborate and describe principles that can help resolve ethical dilemmas in research with people especially children (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Alderson & Morrow, 1995; Punch, 2002; Hill, 2005, Maciejewska-Mroczek & Reimann, 2016, and others).

The first question that researcher considers is the issue of potential harm involved in not doing the research, or in not involving children, but instead listening only adults (Alderson & Morrow, 1995). It is much easier to do research with adults about children. Unfortunately, they do not reflect the lives of children in different environments. They present only, how adults perceive children's reality. That is why it is worth to risk and to invite children to participate in research. Although, researchers are obliged to remember about basic ethical rules, which help them to protect children.

I would like to focus on the basic rules, which help me to respect children during my research project formulated in the *Ethical Research Involving Children* (2013).

This Guidance identifies key ethical issues arising in research involving children. It invites researchers, parents, and educators to think critically about:

- ethical considerations with regards to research involving children;
- the challenges that arise and that have no clear-cut answers;
- the questions that have relevance and application throughout the different phases of the research process (Graham et al., 2013).

Of course, there are no easy answers and ready-made solutions, but firstly, the researcher considers, whether the research is necessary and should be undertaken. The assumptions about childhood and the children are very important and show how to design the whole research project. The researcher's and children's experiences should be also considered during the stage of analysis. One of the key difficulties arising in this context is an issue of minimalizing disparities in power and status between adult researcher and children (Graham et al., 2013). Children's life experiences are mainly related to kindergarten and school. This makes children accustomed to the fact that it is not appropriate to refuse an adult. Unfortunately, this could limit their independent decision to participate in research (Lisek-Michalska, 2012). These and other questions sometimes have no answers. Instead, it is assumed that research ethics is about much more than procedural compliance with set of rules that can deliver good and safe research in any given context.

Respect for dignity, well-being, and rights of all children, irrespective of context, is central to the philosophy that underpins the *Ethical Research Involving Children* project. Such respect is integral to researchers' decisions and actions concerning the nature and conditions of children's involvement in research, regardless of sector, location, or methodological orientation (Graham et al., 2013).

According to the *Ethical Research Involving Children* (2013), there are three core ethical principles that should be considered by researchers undertaking research involving children:

- respect,
- benefit,
- justice.

Respect is something more than tolerance. It refers to both the context of children's lives and their dignity. Obtaining informed consent for research involvement is an important evidence of respect children's dignity. Not only the Ethical Research Involving Children (2013) raises these guidelines, but also: World Health Association: Declaration of Helsinki, National Children's Bureau, Polish Sociologist's code of ethics. Furthermore, to show a child respect, it is better to know:

- Who the child is?
- What cultural context they are living in?
- How culture shapes their experiences, capabilities and perspectives?

Respect involves also the subjective and relational experiences of children, of course within children's communities, including family, peers, and social structures. Respectful research is connected to the lives of children and founded on the assumption that children's experiences and perspectives should be taken into account. Sometimes it requires negotiation with the children involved, as well as help from potential gatekeepers or other adults participating in the research process. This takes place within the cultural context in which the research is situated and requires reflection on the positioning of children in the local ecosystem, particularly when the researcher brings an 'outsider' perspective to the local context (Graham, et al., 2013). Nowadays, there are three recognised models for obtaining children's informed consent to participate in research: children's own decision, children's informed consent, which is accepted by parents and parental consent, where the child, by reason of his or her age or stage of development, cannot make his or her own decisions (Lisek-Michalska, 2012). In my research project, I obtained the informed consent directly from the street children.

When considering the principle of benefit, there are two components to be taken into account: non-maleficence and beneficence. The principle of non-maleficence means in other words causing no harm. It draws attention of researchers to the fact that they should avoid injury to children, both through acts of commission or omission. It reminds researchers that research that is likely to do harm to children is unethical and should not proceed, and all exclusionary research practices must be avoided (Graham et al., 2013). Participation in some research may involve violation of the child's autonomy or exposure to stress (Lisek-Michalska, 2012). Researchers should consider potential negative impacts on children's lives, sense of identity, and belonging. It also includes consequences of the research, after the researcher has left, as well as during the recruitment and the course of data collection, information gathering, interpretation, and analysis of the data collected. Researchers have an obligation to make protection of children's rights an integral part of the planning, implementation and dissemination of all research (Graham et al., 2013). The principle of beneficence refers to actions that promote the well-being of children, even if this means that the research objective will not be met (Grodin & Glantz, 1994). It refers to a researcher's obligation to strive for their research to improve the status, rights, and/or well-being of children. Accord-

ing to this principle, the answer on the question – whose interests do they put first: the child's, the parents', those of the research, or those of society (Alderson & Morrow, 1995) – is obvious, the child's.

Benevolence is understood as more than acts of kindness and charity, it envisages that both the research process and outcomes include positive benefits. Gaining information from children should result in children, their families, and/or local community receiving something in return for this information (Graham et al., 2013).

The principle of justice is a foundational ethical rule for research involving children. It arises in the relationship between researcher and child, and in any dialogue and conversation between them. The principle of justice requires researchers to be considerate of the power differences inherent in the adult/child research relationship. Respectful listening to children's views, giving due weight to these, and responding to what they have to say is part of important outcomes from research and is consistent with Article 12 of the UNCRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child).

The principle of justice requires researchers to find a balance between the perceived benefits of the research and perceived burdens placed on the participants. Children should always be treated fairly, and the benefits of research should be distributed equitably. The concept of justice must also underpin decisions made by researchers, about which children will be included and which children will be excluded from research. That selection should arise from the research purpose and methodological choice, and not driven by discriminatory intent (Graham et al., 2013). The researchers are obliged to respect participants' rights to (Alderson & Morrow, 1995, p. 20.):

- the best available treatment, care, or resources,
- protection from harm, neglect, and discrimination,
- self-determination, such as by giving informed consent or refusal,
- non-interference and to research that is not too intrusive or restrictive, and respects privacy,
- freedom of expression, so they are able to state their views and have these accurately reported.

In the following section, I discuss the ways in which I dealt with various dilemmas arising in research with street children, appealing to these main issues of respect, benefit, and justice explained above.

## **2. Respect**

When considering respect as a main ethical rule during my research project, I would like to mention two important issues: consent for research and subjective treatment of participants of research.

### 2.1. Informed consent for research

According to ERIC (Graham et al., 2013), trying to obtain an informed consent for research is a means of a respect for children's dignity. In the case when we conduct research with adults, they themselves sign such informed consent. It is worth mentioning, that it is safer for researcher to have written and not verbal consent. The written evidence is easier to prove and the participant of research retreats much less often. The model agreement also could be added to the research project. In the case of research involving children, it is not so straight forward and may confuse the researcher's activities. In some countries research ethics boards require that the researchers should contact parents who sign the informed consent form on behalf of their children. There is no such legal regulation in Poland, but the practice of asking for informed consent is much more common in Poland as well (for example, regulations of the Sociologist's Code of Ethics, 2012). What I want to stress, is that the most important and difficult to reach is to get a wish to take part in research project. If you have it, signing the informed consent is easier. After all, they – the children – will work with us during the research project. Apart from the child's age, a clear explanation and conversation about the research planned by the researcher will help in establishing contact and will result in mutual trust. The researcher should not omit young children. They do not have to sign the form, but they can express their voluntary choice in other ways. It may seem to us adults that child does not really understand what will happen. However, we do not know unless we try. Working with children often shows that children surprise us with their perception and creation of the world, and are able to understand much more than we expect from them.

Having children's verbal consent to participate in the research project was my ethical priority. Although today, I would have asked for written agreement to take part in the research. It would be a compliance with personal data protection. For children, what is more important to me, it would have been the proof of me having treated them seriously, with respect. At the time when I conducted my project, the same research ethics rule did not apply. Despite that, it was not so easy to get that verbal consent. Street children / children on the street, stay on the street because they try to escape from the adults. When, as an adult researcher I came to their territory and wanted to know them and their life, they sensed danger. Almost immediately, some of them showed signs of hostility: „dogs (street children call police officers „dogs” in their slangs) will know where we are going”. At the beginning, they thought that I was a police officer who threatened their freedom on the street. Even though I worked with many of them while volunteering at their territory, the trust I gained back than seemed to disappear when I met them as a researcher entering their own spaces. Street children / children on the street are not willing to invite strangers to their life. It is their environment, mostly difficult and uncomfortable, but away from adults, their parents, and carers. I wanted to enter to those spaces, drop into with my adult advices on how they

should live. Consequently, I was regarded as an enemy and for that reason, I was approached with suspicion and hostility.

After the invitation to the research, I encouraged children to take one day to consider my request. I think it was a good decision. The fear and other negative emotions subsided and the next day they did not see me as an „intruder” who wanted to control their street life. At the same time, choosing interesting research methods for children, which aroused their curiosity, I encouraged some children to participate in research. I did not follow educators’ advice to buy over the children. Probably, things might have been easier, but the ethical dimension of that did not allow me to in any way bribe or to buy their trust. I thought that buying ice creams or other sweets for children would make them show me what they thought I wanted to see instead of showing me what they wanted to share.

One of my greatest fears during the research process was that no child would agree to walk the streets with me. Despite not receiving any material triggers, walking around the city, taking photos of their favourite places, seemed to them so attractive that some of the children agreed to my invitation. I cooperated with children from the care institution, which meant that touring the city with me brought also a sense of variety to their everyday life. Thanks to engagement with my research, they could break the spell of boredom and everyday institutional routines, and instead – participate in something they considered much more attractive. The first volunteers encouraged others. The children were assured that all what they had showed to me stayed the secret. They knew that other adults did not hear about it. Consequently, they started to convince other children to participate in the project. The list of children willing to cooperate expanded. Maybe children indicated by carers from institution did not report to research. However, if they did not want to attend, I think that they would not be willing to show anything. And sweets or other gifts would not be helpful. Possibly, I would get the data, which they had showed for the sake of showing, but not that which they would show from their real life if they wanted.

Involving street children/children on the street in research, having their educator’s informed consent is necessary (Butler & Williamson, 1994). Mostly, they are parents, but when the research project is in the institution, we could ask their educators for agreement. I chose children from the care institution, so I needed informed consent from the care workers who were children’s legal guardians. In the case of doing research with street children / children on the street, obtaining the consent of legal guardians may provide some difficulties. First of all, access to their parents could be difficult. These children come from problematic families. Their parents do not want to appear, do not want to talk about their children. The appearance of the researcher, who wants to enter their private lives threatens their family secret. These parents protect their children and families, but sometimes they may also want to hide their family’s problems.



Sometimes obtaining an informed consent is more difficult or almost impossible, because of the inability to reach the parent, for example when s/he is in a prison or an addiction treatment centre. Even the child who is ashamed of his/her family situation may not want to give us contact to his/her parents. The researcher also takes the risk of withdrawing consent to the research. In this kind of situation, the whole research project, all preparations and realizations turn out to be impossible to continue and finish.

Pondering about the sampling strategy, I also considered the possibility of obtaining an informed consent from biological parents of the children. The children were willing and gave me their consent because of the interesting research idea that appealed to them. On the other hand, the choice of children from a childcare institution resulted in my obtaining the consent of the director of the institution and its employees, but not of individual parents. The children's parents who were taking part in my research, had limited parental rights. For that reason, the consent obtained from the care workers was enough.

## 2.2. Subjective treatment of participants

In qualitative research, all participant are treated subjectively. In case of the research involving street children/children on the street, it is more difficult. The position of a child in our society always depends on the position of an adult. Despite of many voices about subjectivity in bringing up children (Gordon, 1991; Gurycka, 1989) partner relations between children and their parents, children's opinions are still considered less relevant than adults. A similar situation is reflected in scientific research. Children depend on an adult researcher. Sometimes "used" by him/her to obtain an interesting research material (Morrow & Richards, 1996). I wanted to avoid this kind of situation. While designing the research project and considering the ethical rules, I planned that I would create research reality with those children. I knew that I was not able to reach partner relations in the research. However, I could be their partner while walking the streets.

I expected that children would tell me about their experiences of living on the street. I also decided to give something back to the children willing to participate in the research project. I hoped that behaviour would allow me to treat the children subjectively and it would allow me to get closer to the children. I began volunteering at their care institution. Before embarking on the research project, I spend some time with those children. I helped them with their homework, or spent their free time with them. In that way, I could compensate them for what they later gave me – their time. Also, before I asked the children to show me their lives on the street, I presented to them my live, my space and the closer environment. Preparing a multimedia presentation and then a small show about myself, I encouraged children to tell me about themselves. It is much easier to open up to the person that one has got to know already.

The next thing, which I could offer to the children instead of participating in research, was the research method (Krzychała, 2004). It enabled them to actively participate in the project, but it also diversified their everyday life in the childcare institution. The opportunity to explore the city together, taking photos of their favourite places, walking wherever they wanted in the street, making their own decisions, showed to the children that their opinions in the research project were very important. Very quickly, the children took the initiative. They felt important and understood that that research would not take place without them. They could become my partners in the street. We could cooperate while doing the photo reportages. What's more, I appeared in their lives as an adult who listened to them. It was important for the participants that they could talk to an adult, not just listen to her. Also, my genuine interest in children was quickly noticed and appreciated through openness and activity that children demonstrated during the research.

Subjective treatment of the children in my research project was facilitated by the fact that the research took place in the children's own environment. When I was planning the research, I was unaware that the place where we would visit would determine the role that both children and myself would take. The fact that we could transfer our research to the street made children feel positive and in control of the environment and the situation. I was a tourist/stranger only (Bauman, 1996) guided around the street by children. The situation was different in the childcare institution, where I dominated the decisions made. Thus, subjective treatment of children was even forced by the place of research. The street, foreign to the researcher, gave children confidence and at the same time it allowed them to open up. However, as a foreigner on the street I felt less confident than in the institution.

### **3. Justice-information about the „third” persons**

The principle of justice requires researchers to find balance between the perceived benefits of the research and the participants' expectations. Sometimes it is a very serious dilemma not to discuss all collected data. I had that kind of situation and it related to the information about children's educators. The consent of adults to examine their children has certain consequences that they are often unaware of. Moreover, even a researcher is not always able to predict such consequences before carrying out a research project. It also happened in the case of my research with street children / children on the street because I aimed at researching not only the children themselves and their life on the street, but also the functioning of the institution and the work of the children's educators. Although it was not a research intention, it was important in case of understanding some data and it was even necessary for the analysis and final conclusions. I faced a difficult decision regarding the ways in which to show the lives of street children / children on the street, without prejudice to the interests of their educa-

tors and, at the same time, while knowing that without recourse to their work and perception of it by children, I would not be able to show the world of street children. At that point, I chose the interests of the researcher and I referred to all the data obtained. I also showed how educators work with children on the street, despite the fact that I had previously got permission to examine only children, not their educators. Obtaining that additional information was as surprising to me as it was to them. The use of a group discussion as a method of collecting data among educators helped me not only to collect research material, but also helped them to become aware of certain aspects of their work. Conversation with other educators, free exchange of information, and even mutual counselling, caused that they could have a reflection on their own activities, get support from their colleagues, exchange information, and share their own ways of dealing with various difficulties. Therefore, what happened during the research exceeded not only my expectations, but also the expectations of the educators who could reflect upon their specific understanding of street child/child on the street and effectiveness of their interaction with those children. What is more, I did not impose the knowledge about children on them through showing the results of the research, but they could obtain that knowledge by sharing information and the discussion they had with their colleagues from work. The role that I had in the discussion among the educators allowed for free exchange of both – information and tips between them. I only suggested the topic of the discussion and left the conversation to its participants. I did not interfere, although, the educators asked me to moderate the discussion when they started to depart from the main topic. I think that the role of a listener, not a professional who moderates the course of the discussion and gives tips on how to work, helped in establishing good contact, opening up, and providing each other information and support in professional work.

Therefore, when undertaking research, we obtain data not only about participants of our research, but also about their entire environment. Sometimes, feeling of unconsciousness for both – the researcher and the participants of the research, that so much additional data can possibly be collected. From today's perspective, I believe that in such situations, for ethical reasons, we should also ask for permission to disclose the data of those people whose profiles appeared unintentionally in the research, even if it happens during, or at the very end of the project. Of course, we could come back to our all participant and after the research report is finished, to show results and discuss its' publication. It is a core ethical principle to strive for justice for all participants in the process of research and after.

#### **4. Benefit**

Considering benefit as an ethical rule, the most important aspect for me is not to harm children and to give them as much as possible from the research project. I will reflect

about the depth of contact between researcher and children, adult's presence during the research, sharing and publishing the results.

#### 4.1. Intensity of contact

While conducting research, the researcher should be aware that his/her actions will leave a certain trace in the life and memory of the participants. The researcher often enters the private sphere of people with whom he/she cooperates and completing the project is just the end of a certain stage of work for him/her, but it does not always have to be the same for the participant. The matter is even more delicate when we do research with children. Children become more attached; they can get more emotionally connected with the researcher. They cling to people who devote their attention and time to them, and then can feel abandoned and deceived. Yet, they entrust part of their lives, and the researcher after achieving his/her goal suddenly disappears. It can evoke a feeling of being used.

When I leave care institution I never know if I left behind any empty space. And I am not able to find it out. However, I tried to prevent children from becoming attached to me through undertaking some actions that I will describe later. Actually, the children from the care institution (or maybe rather their attitude towards me) helped me. Participants of my research were accustomed to many volunteers who appear for some time and then leave the care institution. I noticed that the children learned how not to get emotionally attached to those people. They knew that sooner or later volunteers would „disappear”, so it could be said that the children were treated very instrumentally. That „defence mechanism” protected them from psychological trauma and sense of abandonment. That is why new people appearing in care institutions were identified with their specific actions taken in relations to children. As a researcher I was identified with city tours and taking photos. With the end of the project, my visits in the care institution stopped. However, from the very beginning I made the children aware of the fact that I would be with them as long as the research project was ongoing. I believe that honesty of the researcher helped, although it might not have completely prevented children from the feeling of being left behind.

The moment of separation from children is also very important. I was wondering if it should be fast and painless (at least, in my opinion, it would be the best solution), or maybe I should gradually limit my presence in the lives of the respondents. I had the impression that the first strategy would be the best. Today, I would make the same decision – simply disappear with the end of the research. However, I am often wondering if presenting the results of our work to children after completing the analysis and interpretation would be more subjective treatment of children than leaving without sharing the achievements of our joint work with them. Similarly, I am considering the invitation of children to collecting and analysing research material. Although this is

still methodologically unresolved, I think that it could be very interesting in terms of research.

The intensity of the relationship between the researcher and the participants of the research generates not only problems in parting, but also means making ethical and intellectual effort to maintain objectivity of the research. Getting acquainted with the scientific literature on street children/children on the street (Bielecka, 2005; Kołak, 2003; Mickelson, Roslyn, 2003; Olszewska-Baka, 2000) before doing research, helped me to create a picture of a street child who is lost, clumsy, poor, with lower than average intellectual abilities, and who is waiting for help from the adults. However, the children who were researching with me showed me another face of the street child / child on the street. Strong, independent, resourceful, coping in extremely difficult situations and conditions, presenting themselves as adults who are not afraid of anything. The attitude of the pedagogue – researcher which I adopted at the beginning of the research, was modified by the children into the role of researcher – tourist to whom the children show their world. My illusions about the poor child who was waiting for my care, protection, and teaching activities were quickly corrected by the reality of the street child's world.

#### 4.2. The presence of an adult with a child during research

Conducting research involving children leaves doubts as to whether adults – legal guardians of children – should accompany the researcher at the time of collecting the data. At the beginning, I planned that I would go out with willing children and at least one of the carers. However, when a group of children gathered and we were about to leave, the decision, changed. I went alone with the children on a city tour to visit children's favourite places. Of course, from the research benefits, that situation was better. First of all, unaccompanied children behaved more freely and more naturally. I could only take on the role of a researcher, not intervene in their behaviour. In addition, carers expected that their pupils behave better than in reality, and even more so in the face of scientific research. After all, they were their children, brought up by them. In order to obtain benefits for themselves, children from childcare institutions behaved as adults expect them to. They quickly guessed what adults wanted to achieve and often encouraged by awards, played the roles expected from them. So, during our walk, they could be free from the desire to please or impress their educators. However, my mental comfort was at risk. At that time, I became responsible for the children and I felt fear about them when they walked on the roofs or smoked cigarettes. However, going out alone with the children allowed me to gather research material that I would not have obtained if they had been accompanied by a guardian. Although going out without an additional adult was risky for me, however, from today's perspective I know that it is more convenient for the research results.

#### 4.3. Providing information obtained from children to their educators

At the moment when I obtained an informed consent for the research from children and their educators, I felt obliged to repay them in some way. I omitted at this point that the children were provided with some entertainment in relation to the routine of everyday life in the childcare institution. The children were very interested in getting their photographs taken, so every child got a CD with photos of the research group they participated in. The situation turned out to be more complicated in the case of educators. They also asked me for photo materials. According to Thomas and O'Kane (2019) children have full autonomy in deciding who and what information they will share. I tried to respect the principle of confidentiality (Lisek-Michalska, 2012). I promised the children that the educators would not see all the photographs and would not receive photos from me, just as they would not learn about our conversations, so this request I could not fulfil. The situation turned out to be difficult, as it was somewhat perceived as my ingratitude. However, I convinced the educators to ask the children for materials because I had already given that to them. The children's willingness to share their exploits and materials helped me get out of that awkward situation. I could keep my promise to children and satisfy the curiosity of the legal guardians of the children who agreed to this study.

#### 4.4. Publish results

Ethical dilemmas are also revealed at the very stage of publishing data. In the case of my research, the situation was difficult because together, with the children, we collected a lot of photographs. However, it is very easy to recognize the subjects themselves in such material. It is true that you can try to retouch faces, blur, and stick. However, the participants themselves and their immediate surroundings are able to recognize individuals, and this is a formal problem with personal data protection and moral difficulty, because I promised children that educators would not recognize them. So, you can try not to disclose research material. However, then there is a methodological difficulty, unresolved in the world of science, or without showing at least part of the research material, our results are reliable and will be accepted and introduced to the world of science. It is an unresolved difficulty for me till today. I disclosed photos. I even negotiated with the publishing house to retouch the photos as much as possible and respect the children's rights to anonymisation (Wiles et al., 2011). However, I am aware that children could both be proud that their photographs were in a scientific publication, and sad that someone could recognize them. However, I will not convince myself of this, because, as I wrote earlier, returning to the facility would be re-establishing relationships that have already been broken for the benefit of the respondents and it is better not to renew them for emotional reasons. Therefore, I will leave this question unresolved.

I have considered negative impacts of research for children's lives and not only during the research project but after. Unfortunately, it is impossible to predict them all, but I think that the most important is to be conscious and try to not harm children. Doing research with street children, going with them through the street is a specific situation. They showed to me places which were unknown to their educators. Of course, to be in solidarity with adults I would have to get police officers and workers of children's care institution to those places. However, children's trust was much more important to me. If there were any dangerous situations for those children, I would have reacted differently. Although the children were safe, so there was no need to ruin their trust.

### **5. Reflections for the next research project**

Today, it is very tempting for me to propose that children could have participated in the analysis of research material. In a way, this possibility is provided by the documentary method, where children commented on their photographs themselves and not only at this point gave me new information, but at the same time made a preliminary analysis of the research material we gathered. At that time, I was surprised by the depth and insight of the children when they expressed their views on the observed images. I believe that such an analysis would be much more interesting and cognitively valuable. Also, I have no doubts about the child's developmental potential, because she/he understands her/his world best and can explain it to us, if there is a desire to listen to them. However, there is doubt as to how to organize it methodologically. Should children participate in all stages of the analysis or only at the beginning? Whether and how, especially the younger ones are to edit the final text. This thread of ethical dilemmas remains for me only in the form of questions and future research intentions and solutions.

It is not possible to construct a set of moral precepts that would clearly indicate the right course of action depriving the researcher of ethical dilemmas. In any difficult situation, the researcher must make her own decision. Talking about these dilemmas, however, allows for greater sensitivity of researchers in research proceedings whose subject is a child. However, participatory research allowing the child to participate in the entire research process helps avoiding many ethical difficulties. Thanks to this approach, respect along with the subjective approach to the child, doing justice to the child, or remuneration through participation in a way enforces maintaining ethical priorities. However, in such research processes it is very difficult to protect a child from harm. Certain situations are unpredictable, and the researcher must be very vigilant so that during the research and after the child does not suffer any problems, difficulties, or unpleasantness. The effectiveness of such research is also puzzling. During such a research process, the researcher has very little impact on the entire research

process. Therefore, one cannot supervise the effectiveness of this research. Engaged subjects strive for research success because they want to talk about themselves and their lives. They share the goal of the research with the researcher to show part of their reality, and this priority leads to efficiency. Research involving children can be effective and ethical, and children's involvement can be a great help. It is important to enable them and allow them to act also in the sphere of the research process.

At the end of this reflection, I would like to propose some advices for researchers involving children in research:

- Try to spend some time with children before conducting the study to gain their trust;
- The natural children`s environment is the best place to do research;
- Try to do research only with children without third persons;
- An interesting method that activates children and arouses their curiosity could be helpful in involving children to the research;
- Try to create as much partner relationships as possible;
- Let children make their own decisions;
- Do not be afraid to talk with children about research project and ask about consent on their participation in the research;
- Ask for a permission to disclose the data of those people whose profiles appeared unintentionally in the research, even if it happens during or at the very end of the project;
- Try to prevent the children from becoming attached to you: make the children aware of the fact that you will be in their life as long as the research project is going on;
- Give back to the research participants, e.g. provide a great fun, souvenir photos, or your book.

The experiences of working with children in research often demonstrate that children may surprise us-adults with the perception and creation of the world and they are able to understand much more than we expect from them. Children can be great partners in research and could introduce the researcher to the difficult for her/him, however, so fascinating research journey.

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