

Researching the Experience of Refugee Children: Key Ethical Considerations

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1 Introduction

Research involving children¹ is critically important for understanding their lives and can contribute to strengthening laws, policies and practices that advance their human dignity, rights and well-being. This has particular resonance for children from refugee² backgrounds, whose life experiences can be vastly different from most other Australian children and whose human dignity and rights may have been threatened in fundamental ways. Drawing on the perspectives and insights of children who have had refugee and resettlement experience is essential for understanding and improving social conditions for resettled children and families. However, such research is not straightforward. It involves decision-making about a range of complex issues and can be fraught with ethical challenges and dilemmas. A 'paint by numbers' approach, whereby preordained processes are followed in sequential order, cannot address the range of ethical issues arising, nor ensure that research is ethical in its entirety.

- 1 Children are defined in accordance with Art 1 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) as 'every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier'. We acknowledge that definitions of children and youth vary according to law, culture and custom.
- 2 We have taken as starting point the definition of refugee contained in Art 1A(2) of the *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* (Refugee Convention).

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