

Formative Design Research - Ethiopia

Observation guide for youth and adult researchers

Overview

For this observation, choose a public location where adolescents tend to come together. You will observe a group of adolescents in a social environment (for example, school grounds, an activity center or shopping area). Observations of in-school youth should NOT take place during school hours. If you conduct your observation on school grounds, make sure you seek permission from school officials before beginning your observation. In other settings, be sure to notify any nearby shopkeepers that you are conducting research.

1. Your observation of adolescents may be brief, since you should observe people who are not aware of your objectives. If the group you are observing leaves the area, look for another set of adolescents to observe. Plan to base your observation on at least 30 minutes of observation notes.
2. Try to write down as much as you can about what you're observing while not being obvious. Use bullet points and notes, rather than full sentences so you can spend more time observing and less time writing. Do not try to evaluate or interpret what you observe in your notes. Just write what you see and hear. Make sure to write down:
 1. What you are seeing the person do. Don't make assumptions, just write what you see.
 2. How the person you are observing is doing what they are doing. Does it require effort? Do they appear rushed? Pained? Relaxed? How does the person look as they are doing this activity?
3. Include in your observation notes the estimated age of the adolescents you observed, a physical description of them (gender, physical characteristics, clothing), and a description of the setting.
4. When you have completed the observation, review your notes and write a summary analysis addressing the following questions. Ask yourself:
 1. Why do you think the person or group was doing what they were doing?

Observation questions

1. What did you notice about the physical development of the adolescents you observed?
2. Identify whether the group you were observing was a clique or a crowd (and explain your reasons for your conclusion). Were there leaders of the groups? What else did you notice about who was in the peer group?
3. Was the peer group same-gender or mixed gender? If the peer group was primarily made up of one gender, was there any interaction with peer groups of the other gender?
4. What did you notice about the group's interactions with each other? What sort of emotions did members of the group show? Were they happy? Relaxed?
5. Did it appear that any of the adolescents were "together" in terms of dating or in a romantic relationship with an adult? What did the relationship look like?
6. Were any adolescents using technology such as cell phones or computers? What did the adolescents' interactions with technology look like?
7. If you could hear and understand dialogue, did you notice any references to, or discussion of behaviors you would consider to be sensation seeking?
8. Did you notice any adolescents talking about romantic relationships?

9. Did any of the adolescents engage in any form of, or discussion of, risk behaviors?
(Optional: Were any of the adolescents smoking or using other chemicals?)
10. If you observed any pregnant adolescents, how did they interact with other adolescents?
How were pregnant adolescents perceived by others around them?
11. How did the adolescents react to any adults around them? (Hint: any power differences in the interaction, how was freedom of expression, level of respect?)
12. How did adults react to the adolescents? (Hint: any power differences in the interaction, was the interaction respectful?)
13. How confident or trusting were the adolescents around the adults?
14. What else did you notice during your observation that is important to include in your notes?