

Using web-based interactive mapping to inform an ecological systems understanding of young migrants' support networks

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This article presents the researcher experience of using web-based interactive maps on internet-connected tablets as a data collection method during fieldwork conducted with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Adelaide, South Australia. The fieldwork contributed to a study which used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to explore how young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds (re)develop their social networks. The article contributes to discussions about novel data collection methods that are derived from and have the capacity to extend theory to answer specific research questions. The study that this paper draws on sought to explore how newly arrived young people from refugee backgrounds (re)develop their social networks, which are critical to young people's health and wellbeing, in their country of resettlement. We aimed to develop culturally and ethically appropriate data collection methods that could explore the dynamics of social networks using an ecological systems approach. The purpose of the paper is to report on the researcher experience of utilising these methods rather than reporting on study findings, although these are described to some extent in order to demonstrate how such methods may be used to engage with and develop theory.

Following a brief outline of the types of methods that have been used to explore young people's understandings of their social networks, the paper explores ways in which social researchers use mapping techniques to increase understandings of how social relationships develop across space. From there, we consider how Bronfenbrenner's (1981, 2005) ecological systems theory may be used to explain the (re)development of new migrants' social networks across time and space. Finally, we demonstrate how interactive geographical mapping data collection techniques can be used to operationalise an ecological systems model that offers explanations of how social, temporal and geographical processes and linkages are maintained across continents as well as interconnecting in the (re)development of young migrants' networks.

The paper concludes that using a web-based interactive mapping application as a data collection tool is effective and appropriate for research with recent migrants. We suggest that the method has the potential for broader application, for example in studies with other highly mobile groups, or those with transnational networks. While using a web-based interactive mapping application requires a degree of participant technological literacy, in conjunction with interviews, it is a valuable addition to the qualitative researcher's methodological toolbox.

Keywords: migrants; young people; interactive maps; ecological systems theory; social networks; Bronfenbrenner

