



## **Researching Human Action in Saudi Arabia: Adapting and Using the Qualitative Action-project Method**

Aziza Alnuaim, Hind Khalifa, Richard A. Young, Sheila K. Marshall and Natalee Popadiuk

### ***Abstract***

Researchers working in various regions of the world, such as Saudi Arabia, where little joint research has been conducted on youth together with their families, tend to adopt theories and research methods with less than full transparency about how the researchers have adapted them. In this article, we describe the action-project method, a qualitative research method for conducting research with particular application to unique and understudied cultural contexts. The method was used to describe the joint processes between parents and adolescents in a Saudi-Arabian sample. It is based on a conceptualization of human behavior as process oriented, systemic phenomena in which context and culture are critical to an integrated understanding of the person. The method uses a longitudinal design involving observations and interviews. The cultural application of this method to the study of transition-to-adulthood processes in Saudi Arabia is addressed, including its cultural appropriateness and the process of adapting and using it in Saudi Arabia.

**Keywords:** Researching, Human Action, Qualitative Project, Method, Saudi Arabia

**Aziza Alnuaim** is a Professor in Social Studies, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Her research interests include transitions to adulthood, migration, gender, and ethnicity. Recent publications: Khalifa, H., Alnuaim, A. A., Young, R. A., Marshall, S. K., & Popadiuk, N. (2018). Crafting continuity and change in Saudi society: Joint parent-youth transition-to-adulthood projects. *Journal of Adolescence*, 63, 142-152; and Alnuaim, A. A. (2010). Urban poverty and its connection to internal migration: a sociological study of some of the inner-city neighbourhoods of Riyadh. *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 3(4), 534-550.

**Hind Khalifa** is a Professor in Social Studies at King Saud University, as well as a Board Member of the Human Rights Commission, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Her research interests include the Sociology of childhood, social change, and cultural studies. Recent Publications: Khalifa, H., Alnuaim, A. A., Young, R. A., Marshall, S. K., & Popadiuk, N. (2018). Crafting continuity and change in Saudi society: Joint parent-youth transition-to-adulthood projects. *Journal of Adolescence*, 63, 142-152; and Al Khalifa, H. (2018). Factors affecting the achievement motivation among Saudi Youth: A study on a sample of university graduates. *Journal of Human Sciences*, 2018(2), 13-45.

**Richard A. Young** is a Professor Emeritus of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. His research interests include: Contextual Action Theory, Action-Project Method, and vocational psychology. Recent publications: Young, R. A., Domene, J. F., Valach, L., & Socholotiuk, K. (2021). Exploring human action in counseling psychology: The action-project research method. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 68(3), 331–343; and Young, R. A., Domene, J. F., Botia, L. A., Chiang, M. M. J., Gendron, M. R., & Pradhan, K. (2021). Revitalising decent work through inclusion: toward relational understanding and action. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 49(2), 166-176.

**Sheila K. Marshall** is a Professor Emeritus of Social Work at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. Her research interests include adolescent development, transition to adulthood, and parent-youth relationships. Recent publications: Marshall, S.K., Botia, L.A., Chiang, M.M-C., Domene, J.F., Noel, M., Pradhan, K., & Young, R.A. (2021). Using Contextual Action Theory and Action-Project Method to study real-time identity. *Identity*, 21, 309-323. doi: [10.1080/15283488.2021.1960166](https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2021.1960166); and Marshall, S.K., Quinn, A., Charles, G., & Jamieson, A. (2020). Going beyond “who” and “how”: Expanding understanding of foster coparenting through the application of contextual action theory and action-project method. *Child and Youth Services Review*, 116, 105187.

**Natalee Popadiuk** is a Professor Emeritus of the Counselling Psychology Program, Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria, Victoria, B.C. Her research interests include international student issues and the importance of relational connections and disconnections in transitions. Recent publications: Popadiuk, N., & Arthur, N. (2021). University-to-work transition for emerging adult international students in Canada. In E.A. Marshall & J. Symonds (Eds.), *Young adult development at the school-to-work transition: International pathways and processes* (pp. 402-422). Oxford University Press; and Popadiuk, N. E. (2013); and Career counsellors and suicide risk assessment. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 41(4), 363-374.

### **Funding**

The research was supported by the Deanship of Scientific Research, King Saud University, through the international research group project No IRG14-03.

### **Acknowledgement**

The authors are indebted to research assistants Mona Alnader, Abeer BinSafran, Albandary Alsehely and to the families who participated in this research project.

## ***Introduction***

Culture is assuming greater importance and more explicit methods are being used in psychological research (e.g., McLean, 2022). How culture is understood and approached in the research design is an important issue. Another is adapting methods, often developed in one culture, for the culture community in which they will be used. These challenges have been addressed in the literature in several ways including (1) how culture is understood (e.g., Zagaria, 2022), (2) the conceptual framework of the research study (e.g., Collins & Stockton, 2018), (3) the cultural appropriation of the method, (4) language and other behavioural differences (e.g., Chiumento et al., 2017), and (5) researchers' identification with the culture (e.g., Bowlby & Day, 2018). Raeff (2020) and others (e.g., Stead & Young, 2006) suggested that a focus on human action, that is what people do with each other, is a way to incorporate culture in both theory and research. In this paper we discuss how these challenges were addressed in a qualitative research study about the conversations between parents and youth in Saudi Arabia (Khalifa et al., 2018). Specifically, using the case example of this study of the processes in which parents and young people engage together relative to the young person's future, we intend to illustrate how the qualitative action-project method (e.g., Young et al., 2005), and its corresponding conceptual framework (e.g., Young et al., 2002) were adapted to a specific cultural context and addressed culture as a central part of the research question.

One of the challenges in researching processes in which culture is a factor is that previously psychology was conceived of as a science that was independent of culture, that what was true of human behaviour was true universally. That perspective is clearly no longer the case (e.g., Gone, 2011). Qualitative research methods have been proposed as one means of shifting the focus away from the universalist assumption. However, qualitative research methods vary in how they conceptualize culture and access it for research purposes. The following case example is one means of doing both.

To address parent-youth conversations in families in the context of Saudi Arabian society, we describe the adaptation and use of a qualitative research method, specifically the action-project method (Young et al., 2005, 2021), and the conceptual framework on which it is based, that is, contextual action theory (Young et al., 1996, 2002). By briefly reviewing the pertinent Saudi Arabian literature, we provide the context for the study and why the particular method was chosen and adapted. By describing how the action-project method was adapted and used in studying parent-youth joint actions over time in Saudi society relative to the youth's future, we illustrate a means to conduct psychological research that is context and process oriented and culturally sensitive. By providing detailed information about how we adapted the method to be culturally appropriate, we demonstrate our attempts to ground our work in the local culture and customs. Finally, we share how qualitative research can add value to the current body of research.

### ***Background and Context for the Study***

This study on which this case example is based arose because of a desire on the part Alnuaim and Khalifa to look more closely at parents' and young people's involvement in youth development in Saudi Arabia, given the rapid changes in the population and family organization. The discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia is considered a turning point in its modern history. The dramatic increase in the price of oil in the 1970s, led to extremely rapid economic change (Al-Farsy, 1978; El Mallakh & El Mallakh, 1982). The social impact of this rapid economic growth marked a watershed in social change in Saudi Arabia. Thus, it is argued that prior to the oil boom, social process and structures had remained relatively unchanged over generations, whereas after the mid-1970s dramatic transformations occurred throughout the social and economic systems (Altorki, 1992). The contemporary nuclear family in urban Saudi society bears responsibilities and burdens that used to be shared with the members of the traditional extended family (Khalifa, 2011; Bocaboos, 2012).

Furthermore, Saudi society is experiencing for the last five years rapid socio-economic change, starting with the implementation of Vision 2030 (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2022) as a strategy for development in Saudi Arabia. The changes have led to more education in the current cohort of young people (Barry, 2021), as some of the 2030 objectives are to provide more opportunities in education and the work force, for both male and female youth. One of the vision 2030 primary objectives is to empower women, increase the proportion of females in the work force, and provide women with jobs in all work sectors, including the military. Therefore, Saudi youth today are playing new social and economic roles which bring with them cultural change and create potential differences between parents and youth. In order to have deeper understanding of the impact of these changes on family life and parent-youth relationship, it is essential to conduct studies on families and change in Saudi Arabia.

Khalifa et al. (2018) endeavoured to examine how youth and their parents negotiate plans for youth's futures while interpreting cultural forces of continuity and change. In addition to population changes, Alnuaim and Khalifa noted research challenges in the existing literature. Among these challenges in Saudi Arabia were the scant amount of research literature on parents and youth and the narrow range of research methods used. Much of the contemporary research on youth and their families tended to use survey (e.g., AlMakadma & Ramisetty-Mikler, 2015; Rajab et al., 2021) or interview (e.g., Moharib, 2013) techniques describing how the quality of parenting is associated with youth outcomes (e.g., Albeladi & Palmer, 2020; Ghazwani et al., 2016). These approaches did not provide in-depth analysis of parent-youth relationship dynamics over time.

A second issue was how research accommodated the cultural differences between Saudi Arabia and the culture in which the theories and research methods were originally developed. When theories and research methods are adopted from other countries, there is often less than full transparency about how the researchers have adapted them. Unfortunately, most studies on families in the Arab world rely on Western theories in conceptualizing the research. Baqader and Alorabi (2006) argue that these theories were built in different cultures and to some extent, are not

suitable to analyze research's findings in Arab culture. This is considered as one of the problematic issues researchers are facing when using theories and methods that were originally developed in foreign cultures. However, in our current research, we attempt to describe the methods we used in adopting "Action-project Method" in a study with Saudi families.

Finally, research has been primarily focused on parenting from the view of the youth (e.g., Alshehri et al., 2020; Alnuaim, 2014a). Although this approach to research attends to the voices of youth, it leaves a gap in knowledge about Saudi parents' responses to young people's actions and tends to assume a unidirectional approach to relationship dynamics. Very few studies focus on the views of Saudi parents (e.g., Alnuaim, 2014b), however, this approach does not fully resolve the problem of understanding how youth and parents respond to each others' actions and how their relationships are enacted.

In order to address some of these challenges in developing, proposing, and carrying out an international collaborative research project in Saudi Arabia, we wanted to use a conceptual perspective and research method that could alleviate these critiques. Specifically, we sought (1) to collect information from within a society that gives rise to the development of constructs that are congruent with the culture, (2) to use theoretical and empirical approaches that assume both partners contribute to the relationship, such as the dynamics of parent-child relationships, (3) to understand how parents and youth contribute to maintaining or challenging cultural norms, as well as how cultural norms and practices shape parent-youth relationship dynamics, (4) to address the lack of studies on the social context of parent-youth interaction, (5) to provide greater transparency on how research methods come to be used in particular societies and cultures, and (6) to introduce qualitative studies to this particular body of research.

### ***Adapting and Using the Action-project Method***

The process of adapting and using the action-project method for a study of the transition-to-adulthood joint parent-youth projects in Saudi Arabia involved considerations at each phase of the research. These included a close understanding of the method and its conceptual basis, applying for and receiving a grant for the research, framing the study from a theoretical and methodological perspective, training research assistants, and recruiting participants. We also accounted for the characteristics of both the research team and the participants, how the data was collected and analyzed, the trustworthiness of the findings, how the findings were reported, and other cultural considerations.

### ***First Steps in Developing the Research Study***

The initial idea for this study developed when Khalifa, one of the researchers from Saudi Arabia, visited Canada during her sabbatical year in 2014. Because of her interest in family research (Khalifa, 2001, 2010, 2011, 2013), she connected with Marshall at the University of British Columbia (UBC) to discuss substantive and methodological issues. Meeting Canadian

researchers at UBC, including Young, was the starting point for a joint research study using the action-project method (Young et al., 2005). Upon returning to Saudi Arabia, Khalifa invited Alnuaim and three graduate student research assistants to join the Saudi team. Marshall and Young approached Popadiuk to join the Canadian team. Once the two teams were formed, the faculty team members met via internet technology to discuss how to apply the method in a different cultural context from the one in which it was originally developed, and to discuss possible opportunities and obstacles in conducting such research.

### ***Understanding Contextual Action Theory and the Action-project Method***

A substantial understanding of the action-project method and the conceptual framework on which it is based was needed prior to making a formal research proposal.

#### ***Contextual Action Theory***

By adopting a theoretical framework, researchers can formulate and answer specific research questions that allow the findings to be understood within a broad research and conceptual field. This practice of adopting a theoretical framework is very evident in quantitative research in the social sciences. However, many qualitative research methods appear to be atheoretical, that is, they are not explicitly based on specific theories. In contrast, the qualitative research method described in this article, that is, the action-project method, is informed by contextual action theory. This theory is substantial and detailed. It is the basis for the formulation of research questions, for the way in which data are collected and analysed, and how findings are presented and the meaning attributed to them. It is an appropriate and useful conceptual framework for the action-project method used to investigate the transition to adulthood in Saudi families as a joint parent-youth goal-directed project.

Contextual action theory refers initially to an understanding or explanation of much of human behaviour as goal-directed (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996, 2002). It seeks to explain human behaviour based on its goals rather than its causes. We refer to this goal-directed human behaviour as action. What distinguishes action from other human behaviour is that it has goals and involves some degree of intentionality on the part of the actor. Actions are different from behaviour resulting solely from bodily reflexes and physiology. Human action involves both observable behaviour and internal cognitive and emotional processes. Any one human action is performed in a certain context and is time-bound. That people engage in action in certain contexts suggests that human action has a social dimension. It is this dimension that gives action its meaningfulness.

We wanted to research processes and practices that are socially constructed and culturally specific. We were interested in the ways in which parents and youth talked about, advised, and engaged with each other relative to the youth's future. We recognized that these actions are cultural processes. They have immediate goals, and are embedded with meanings beyond the immediate

goals. These meanings are readily understood by persons from the same cultural community. Contextual action theory proposes that action can be seen from three perspectives, is organized on three levels, and composed of three systems.

Action, project, and career are the three systems of action. These systems allow the actor and others to link actions in short, medium, and long-term lengths of time. Any specific action is time-bound, but as human beings we recognize that actions are linked across time by common meaning, goals, and intentionality. People engage in specific, time-bound actions because they are seen as contributing to longer-term, more complex goals. Thus, in contextual action theory a series of actions with a common goal across a mid-term length of time is identified as a *project*. The relationship between specific actions to form projects is constructed by the actors themselves and with others in common language and cultural groups that not only recognizes but also constructs a relationship between them.

The third action system is referred to as *career*, that is, when several projects coalesce over a long period of time. Terms such as an occupational career, a marriage career, a parenting career, a patient career, or an illness career have meaning for individuals in their social contexts and are supported by those social contexts.

These systems of action, that is, action, joint action, project, and career, provide a framework in which action can be studied and understood in depth. If researchers restrict themselves to a single, time- and context-bound action, then determining how it constructs a life or a significant part of a life becomes challenging. Similarly, relying simply on retrospective data, as is the case in much qualitative research, may access goals without tying goals definitively to actual behaviour.

Contextual action theory addresses subjective, manifest and social processes. It provides a framework for understanding the goal-directed nature of human behaviour in the short, medium and long-term, and it links behaviour, conscious cognition, and unconscious regulation with meaning in context.

### *The Action-project Method*

The general procedure for the qualitative approach, the action-project method (Young et al., 2001; 2005; 2021) involves identifying a joint project, in the case of this study, a transition-to-adulthood project that the parent and youth were engaged in together. Monitoring progress on that project for a period of six months follows. No assumptions are made about the content of actions or the type of goals or project that participants constructed. Although data collection and analysis were guided by the principles of action theory, the specific findings that emerge represent the participants and their context.

### *Applying for and Receiving a Grant*

A proposal was submitted to the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Saud University,

and the team agreed to accept the grant. After the initial grant was received, the Saudi researcher, Alnuaim, met the Canadian researcher, Marshall, during the summer of 2015 at The University of British Columbia to discuss the study. Thus, the interest of five researchers from two different countries and cultures with different backgrounds, histories, feelings, and understandings of the world met to work together and shape new understandings of the ways youth negotiated their futures. In such a context, the method provided concrete steps to follow. Subsequently, these steps were adapted by the researchers in light of their unique cultural backgrounds.

### ***Applying the Contextual Framework and Method***

The action-project method appealed to the Saudi researchers for several reasons. The focus on goals as they were dynamically constructed in the context of the family seemed particularly relevant to accommodate to how the family and the possible futures for young people were changing in Saudi Arabia. The theory and corresponding action-project method encouraged access to specific cultural discourses with imposing only the broadest criteria for their analysis. The theory, as a social constructionist approach, allowed us to consider these parent-youth conversations about the young person's future as contextually and culturally specific. The opportunity to collect and analyze data with the Arabic and Saudi language communities reflected the cultural sensitivity of the approach.

We assumed that what parents and adolescents did together relative to the young person's future was not a one-time event. We wanted to be able to describe processes across time. Contextual action theory recognizes that actions are time-bound, that is, they occur in a particular time and place. The theory asserts that actions are linked across time by common meaning, goals, and intentionality. People engage in specific, time-bound actions because they are seen as contributing to longer-term, more complex goals. In the case of this study, the longer-term, more complex goal was identified and described as a project. The action-project method allowed us track actions across time and to identify projects.

Contextual action theory provided us with a basis for challenging traditional concepts and methods in psychology – concepts and methods that are frequently culturally constructed and bound. In addition, the approach is unifying rather than segmenting – behaviour is not broken into small pieces. By using this approach, we were able to focus on the process rather than bits of behaviour. Contextual action theory does not separate the acting person from the culture. Indeed, instead of examining separate individuals, the method provides the basis to study action processes in context, in this case, between parents and youth. Finally, we were attracted to the theory and method because they had been used in previous successful and informative research about the transition to adulthood (e.g., Young et al., 2015) and with different cultural groups (e.g., Marshall et al., 2011).



### ***Research Team Demographics***

This research was an international collaboration led by a Saudi research team consisting of two women professors and three women graduate student research assistants living in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The Canadian researchers, one man and two women, were all born and raised in Canada, and live in Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. The team represented the disciplines of Sociology, Family Studies, and Counselling Psychology. The two Saudi professors were involved in all aspects of the study: grant application, training the research assistants, recruiting participants, translating data collection templates into Arabic, documenting the process, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. Two members of the Canadian research team provided training in action theory and method. All five professors on the team participated in regular electronic data analysis meetings, typically every two to three weeks over a six-month period, as well as manuscript meetings, collaboration, and preparation over the next two years.

### ***Planning and Training***

Khalifa invited Alnuaim to assist in translating all procedures and forms from English to Arabic. Subsequently, they were presented and explained to the research assistants to ensure cultural consistency as part of their training and preparation for data collection with participants. The Saudi team then agreed on the chosen population, discussed the procedures, and decided how to approach respondents to assure their continuity over a six-month period. The Saudi team, including the research assistants, met every week to discuss procedures and set timelines. In order to accommodate Saudi cultural gender norms, female research assistants preferred to interview a parent of the same sex. The Saudi team also identified challenges due to ambiguity of the procedures that were subsequently discussed with the Canadian researchers.

### ***Recruitment***

The research assistants recruited participants using word-of-mouth or snowball sampling to recruit participants in their respective communities. Recruitment of participants was not conducted through advertisements in local papers or posters at college and university campuses. Advertisements would not attract Saudi families because they tend to be reluctant about talking about their way of life with people outside the family. Although the original aim was to recruit 20 dyads, 17 dyads participated in the first interview over a 6.5-week period. Of these 17 dyads, 14 dyads participated in all three data gathering sessions. These 14 dyads comprised the data set analyzed for this study.

## *Participants*

Several cultural factors influenced the composition of the group of participants. The study called for a parent and young adult from the same family. In this case, 10 of the 14 dyads involved a mother and either a daughter ( $n = 9$ ) or son ( $n = 1$ ). In four dyads, an older sister participated in the dyad with a younger sister ( $n = 3$ ) or a younger brother ( $n = 1$ ). The participation of the older sisters was due to mothers deferring to their daughters because of the daughters' experience in navigating educational systems and the mothers' own lack of education. None of the parents or older siblings who participated in this study was male.

The following information may assist readers in contextualizing our comments on the study. Mothers' mean age was 51.9 years ( $SD = 6.06$ ;  $n = 10$ ), elder sisters' mean age was 27 years ( $SD = 2.44$ ;  $n = 4$ ), and the youths' mean age was 19.35 years ( $SD = 1.73$ ;  $n = 14$ ). The estimated mean number of completed years of education for mothers was 7.1 years ( $SD = 4.8$ ;  $n = 8$ ), while two had no formal education; the elder sisters' mean years of education was 17.5 ( $SD = 1.00$ ,  $n = 4$ ). At the time of the study, youth had completed an average of 12.8 years ( $SD = 1.95$ ;  $n = 14$ ) of education. Six youth had completed high school and enrolled in college education, whereas seven youth were attending high school full-time in Grade 11 or 12. One youth dropped out of high school and was working in a factory. All participants were Saudi nationals; eleven dyads had migrated from rural areas to Riyadh.

## *Data Collection*

All dyads voluntarily participated in this research and received no honoraria for participation. Data was collected in the participants' homes. During the first data collection session, the dialogue between the youth and parent/older sibling was audio recorded. In the action-project method researchers gathered data about how conversations are enacted in the family. The method is not based on an interview approach.

The audio-recording of the conversation between the dyad partners was a significant departure from the original protocol given that in all of the Canadian studies, participant conversations were video recorded (e.g., Marshall et al., 2011). Audio recording replaced video recording due to issues around privacy and modesty of Saudi families, and of women in particular. There is a practice with some Saudi women, particularly rural or traditional women, of keeping photos of themselves private and not allowing themselves to appear in videos. To substitute for video imagery, the Saudi team used observation as a tool to register participants' gestures. Thus, the researchers decided that they would adjust the method to meet local cultural norms by replacing video with audio recordings.

### *First Data Collection Session*

Data collection involved facilitating a conversation between the parent and adolescent

about the young person's future. This conversation, averaging ten minutes in length was followed by a review of the audiotape with each individual participant and one of the research assistants. During the review (identified as the self-confrontation procedure), the recordings were stopped after each minute and the participant was asked what she/he was thinking and feeling during that minute of the conversation.

### *Second Data Collection Session*

After transcription and analysis (described below) of the initial conversation and the self-confrontation session, each participant was separately presented with a written narrative summarizing the conversation in goal-directed language and tentatively identifying their joint project. The research team had reviewed these narratives prior to them being shared with the participants. After reviewing the individual narratives with each participant, the research assistants met with the youth and parent together, and read the mutual narrative to gain their approval, discuss any development on their joint project, and informed them about the next step in the study.

### *Telephone Monitoring*

After the second interview, each research assistant monitored participants by telephone every two weeks for a period of 6 months to follow up on any changes or progress in the youth and parent joint projects.

### *Third Data Collection Session*

The research assistants met with both the youth and parent to get feedback about the progress they had made on their joint project and to discuss future plans to reach their goals.

## *Data Analysis*

The analysis of qualitative research data requires extensive immersion in the data. As is the case with the action-project method generally (Young et al., 2021), the analysis was sequenced to following the data collection procedures. Specifically, an initial analysis of the first data collection session was conducted to provide the basis of the narrative feedback provided in the second data collection session. Then, a written case analysis followed the data collection for all sessions and the telephone monitoring for each dyad. Finally, when all cases were analyzed separately, a cross-case analysis was conducted.

### *Data Analysis of First Data Collection Session*

The purpose of the analysis of the first data collection was to describe in goal-directed language what had occurred between the participants in their conversation. Using the contextual

action theory framework of elements, functional steps, and goals, the language is coded as elements using a predetermined, but modifiable list of codes, for example, *explains*, *asks for clarification*, *expresses worry*. Using the coded data, functional steps toward goals for approximately each minute of the conversation are identified that, in turn, contribute to the overall identification of the individual and joint goals of the conversation. This specific bottom-up analysis is accompanied by a top-down approach beginning with a preliminary identification of the participants' goals and asking the question "how were the participants attempting to reach that goal?" The coding and other aspects of this analysis are also informed by the self-confrontation, in which participants' intentions may be more explicitly identifiable. Based on this data analysis, the research assistants wrote three narratives—one for each participant and one for the dyad, which were reviewed by the team and then used in the second data collection session, as described above.

### *Within Case Data Analysis*

Following the collection of all data for each case, an in-depth analysis of the whole case occurred. The data from the second data collection session was used to verify or change the identification of the joint project. The telephone monitoring provided data on the extent to which and how the participants were engaged in their joint project across time. Data from the third data collection session was analyzed much like the first data collection session described above. The whole data set for each case was put together to form a comprehensive written summary of the dyad's joint project and how the participants engaged with the project across time. This summary was presented to the whole research team and discussed for salient themes that may have emerged from it.

### *Cross-case Analysis*

Cross-case analysis was conducted by two members of the Saudi team and their Canadian colleagues. The individual cases were randomly grouped in sets of four, such that each case was reviewed twice. These individual cases were read by all members of the team and discussed at subsequent meetings. The purpose of these meetings was to reach consensus on how best to group the individual cases -- the overall framework suggested by contextual action theory, that is, to describe dynamic goal-directed action over time. It is not expected that there will be a single explanation or description for all the cases. However, in this study, the cross-case analysis contributed to an understanding of the unique context in which the joint goal-directed projects occurred.

### *Trustworthiness of the Findings*

A number of factors contributed to the trustworthiness of findings of studies using the action-project method and of this study, in particular. First, and most importantly, the study was designed and led by researchers from the broad socio-cultural group in which the study was con-

ducted. The research method itself was flexible enough to allow these researchers to adapt the method to fit the cultural context in which the data were collected. The characteristics of research assistants were consistent with the cultural expectations of the participants. It is also significant that the research team was composed of members who have extensive first-hand experience with the method and the topic, that is, transition to adulthood.

Secondly, contextual action theory is a broad conceptual perspective that provides a common framework for understanding human action. It does not prescribe hypotheses to be tested—hypotheses that are often generated in different cultural contexts.

Thirdly, the detailed written and audio records, for example, transcription of joint conversations, interviewers' notes of interactions, and the repeated discussion of the findings with the research team, contribute to the audit trail on which the findings are based.

### ***Reporting Findings***

Consistent with how findings are reported in other action-project method studies, the findings in this study were reported in three thematic groups, each one representing a group of cases whose goals were different, namely, negotiating educational and career futures, promoting gender roles and marriage, and shaping independence. As is expected in qualitative research reports, an extensive description of the cases within each thematic group is provided. In addition, all of the cases grouped by these themes participated in a broader joint project, namely, crafting generational continuity and change.

### ***Cultural Appropriateness***

Several distinct advantages emerged as we implemented this research approach. First, using the action-project method helped create a conversation between the parent and youth. It offered an opportunity for them to talk to each other about planning for the youth's future and making decisions, considering power and control, and discussing problems related to their relationship. In some cases, it was the first time for them to talk to each other about such issues. In this way, the research procedure facilitated the degree and way in which parents and youth communicated about these topics, without imposing any a priori expectations about the way in which the conversation would evolve. Secondly, the method helped to address some of the problematic issues that occurred in the parent/youth relationships. At the end of the process of data collection for this study, the participants, in some cases, were more capable of understanding both the parent and youth points of view and appreciating their perspectives.

Providing the opportunity to continue communicating with families who participated in the study for more than six months was also a unique advantage of this approach. A long process of collecting data with Saudi families had previously not been used for different reasons, for example, due to losing interest, being busy, getting irritated by the process of investigating their private

lives, and for being unable to see the outcomes of participating. However, the researchers in this study were able to persevere and complete the data collection with 14 family dyads for the period of time allocated using the action-project research method. It suggests that these participants were engaged by the method and the importance they attributed to the topic.

### ***Conclusion***

By adapting and using methods that address human action in specific contexts and cultures, we can generate information that reflects the goal-oriented way in which most human behaviour is experienced and understood. The research that this qualitative method produced effectively addressed the problems identified at the beginning of this article, namely, lack of cultural appropriateness, limited understanding of how cultural norms and practices shape familial relationships, and provide greater transparency of how research methods come to be used in particular societies. The method and its use in this study point to developing effective means to support Saudi parents and youth in the context of significant social change.

## References

- Albeladi, N., & Palmer, E. (2020). The role of parental mediation in the relationship between adolescents' use of social media and family relationships in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Information Technology Management*, 12(2), 163-183. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22059/jitm.2020.75799>
- Al-Farsy, F. (1978). *Saudi Arabia: A case study in development*. Stacey, International.
- AlMakadma, A. S., & Ramisetty-Mikler, S. (2015). Student, school, parent connectedness, and school risk behaviors of adolescents in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 2, 128-135. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijpam.2015.09.004>
- Alnuaim, A. (2014a). Quality of life among youths in Riyadh. *Journal of Art*, 26(2), King Saud University.
- Alnuaim, A. (2014b). The relationship between mother's cultural background and methods of interaction with their adolescent offspring. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 42(2), University of Kuwait.
- Alshehri, N. A., Yildirim, M., & Vostanis, P. (2020). Saudi adolescents' reports of the relationship between parental factors, social support and mental health problems. *Arab Journal of Psychiatry*, 31(2), 130-143. <https://doi.org/10.12816/0056864>
- Altorki, S. (1992). Women development and employment in Saudi Arabia: The case of 'Unayzah. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 8, 96-110.
- Baqader, A.B., & Alorabi. (2006). *Prospects of contemporary Arab sociology*. Dar Al Feker, Damascus.
- Barry, A. (2021). Equal opportunity in education and employment in Saudi Arabia: Heading in the right direction but challenges remain. *Educational Planning*, 28(1), 7-21.
- Bocaboos, A (2012). *The conditions of Maghreb youth*. Al Rabat, Arab Maghreb Union.
- Bowlby, S. & Day, C. (2018). Emotions, disclosures and reflexivity: Reflections on interviewing young people in Zambia and women in midlife in the UK. In T. Loughran & D. Mannay, D. (Eds.) *Emotion and the researcher: Sites, subjectivities, and relationships (Studies in Qualitative Methodology*, 16, 127-142. ), <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1042-319220180000016009>
- Chiumento, A., Rahman, A., Machin, L., Frith, L. (2017). Mediated research encounters: Methodological considerations in cross-language qualitative interviews. *Qualitative Research*, 18, 604–622. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794117730121>
- Collins, C. S. & Stockton, C. M (2018). The central role of theory in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1),1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918797475>
- El Mallakh, R., & El Mallakh, D. H. (1982). *Saudi Arabia: Energy, developmental planning, and industrialization*. United States Department of Energy, Office of Scientific and Technical Information.
- Ghazwani, J. Y., Khalil, S. N., & Ahmed, R. A. (2016). Social anxiety disorder in Saudi adolescent boys: Prevalence, subtypes, and parenting style as a risk factor. *Journal of Family & Community Medicine*, 23(1), 25-31. <https://doi.org/10.4103/2230-8229.172226>

- Gone, J. P. (2011). Is psychological science a-cultural? *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 17(3), 234–242. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023805>
- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (2022). Vision 2030. <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/>
- Khalifa, H., Alnuaim, A.A., Young, R.A., Marshall, S.K., & Popadiuk, N. (2018). Crafting continuity and change in Saudi society: Joint parent-youth transition-to-adulthood projects. *Journal of Adolescence*, 63, 142-152. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.12.014>
- Khalifa, H. (2001) *Changing childhood in Saudi Arabia: Three female generations*. Doctoral dissertation. The University of Hull, UK.
- Khalifa, H. (2010). *Children and divorce: A study of the children 's perspective on the problems of adaptation in divorced families in Riyadh city*. Department of Scientific Publishing - King Saud University.
- Khalifa, H. (2011). *Family and change: The main challenges facing the Saudi family in the process of socialization*. The Saudi Family Encyclopedia (Part II), Princess Saitha Chair for Family Studies - King Saud University.
- Marshall, S. K., Young, R. A., Stevens, A., Spence, W., Deyell, S., & Easterbrook, A. (2011). Adolescent career development in urban-residing Aboriginal families in Canada. *Career Development Quarterly*, 59, 539-558. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2011.tb00975.x>
- McLean, K. C. (Ed.) (2022). *Cultural methods in psychology: Describing and transforming cultures*. Oxford University Press.
- Moharib, N. I. (2013). Effects of parental favoritism on depression and aggression in Saudi Arabian adolescents. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal*, 41(9), 1497-1510. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.2224/sbp.2013.41.9.1497>
- Raeff, C. (2020). *Exploring the complexities of human action*. Oxford University Press.
- Rajab, T.M., Saquib, J., Rajab, A.M., Enabi, S., Ayash, S.Q.S., Abdelrahman, S.A.A., Khojah, M.A.A., Almazrou, A., & Saquib, N. (2021). The associations of religiosity and family atmosphere with lifestyle among Saudi adolescents. *SSM-Population Health*, 14, 100766. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2021.100766>
- Stead, G.B. & Young, R.A. (2006). Qualitative research methods for a global psychology. In M. Stevens & U. Gielen (Eds.), *Toward a global psychology: Theory, research, intervention, and pedagogy* (pp. 207-232). Erlbaum.
- Young, R. A., Marshall, S. K., Wilson, L. J., Green, A. R., Klubben, L., Parada, F., Polak, E., Socholotiuk, K., & Zhu, M. (2015). Transition to adulthood as a peer project. *Emerging Adulthood*, 3, 166-178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/216769681455930>
- Young, R. A., Valach, L., Ball, J., Paseluikho, M. A., Wong, Y. S., DeVries, R. J., McLean, H., & Turkel, H. (2001). Career development in adolescence as a family project. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 48, 190–202. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-0167.48.2.190>
- Young, R. A., Valach, L., & Collin, A. (1996). A contextual explanation of career. In D. Brown, & L. Brooks (Eds.), *Career counseling and development* (3rd ed., pp. 477-552). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



- Young, R. A., Valach, L., & Collin, A. (2002). A contextualist explanation of career. In D. Brown and Associates (Eds.), *Career choice and development* (4th ed., pp. 206 – 252). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Young, R. A., Valach, L., & Domene, J. F. (2005). The action-project method in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 215–223. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.215>
- Young, R. A., Domene, J. F., Valach, L., & Socholotiuk, K. (2021). Exploring human action in counseling psychology: The action-project research method. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 68(3), 331-343. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/cou0000533>
- Zagaria, A. (2022). What do we talk about when we talk about culture? There is a missing link between natural and social sciences. *Integrative Psychology and Social Science*, 55, 850-857. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-021-09644-6>