SRA news

SRA brings researchers together

Tina Haux, PhD Student at the University of Bath, reports from the successful SRA Summer Event held on 20 July

Over 100 researchers enthusiastically packed into the SRA's summer event, chaired by Andrew Maginn from the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit at the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister. As well as being keen to hear about the challenges and the lessons learnt from evaluating area-based initiatives, participants stayed on into the evening to make the most of the occasion and to continue talking to one another.

Professor Edward Melhuish discussed the origin, design and preliminary findings of the National Evaluation of Sure Start, the original programme set up to give very young children in deprived areas a better start in life, and modelled on the American programme Head Start. The main challenges for the evaluation are that the 525 local programmes can tailor the services to their area; that local programmes tend to take about three years to be set up before they are able to work effectively; and that some of the expected outcomes for children will not emerge until much later.

Dr Peter Tyler gave an overview of the evaluation of the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). Funding through the SRB was available from 1995 to 2001 and focused on the 88 most deprived areas which had been deprived for a long time.

Julia Heynat talked about her experience of carrying out local evaluations of New Deal for Communities (NDC) and gave an insight into the key challenges when working on the ground.

The lively discussion that followed included questions ranging from the tensions between the pace of policy change and evaluations; whether area based initiatives actually help or hinder the long-term development of local areas; how to include non-users in the evaluation of services; whether evaluations so far have been able to capture effects of programmes both on the people and the areas concerned and finally whether we have the number of researchers and level of skills to meet the still increasing demand for carrying out evaluations.

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Next copy deadline: 30 September 2004

www.the-sra.org.uk

ADVANCE NOTICE . . . . . SRA CONFERENCE
Improving the IMPACT of Social Research: 1 December, London

This year's SRA annual conference provides a timely opportunity for social researchers to debate how to improve the impact made by social research, through its organisation, practice and presentation. Siân Llewellyn –Thomas gives a taste of what the conference will offer. The SRA Events committee is currently confirming the final speakers and agenda for the day, but we hope that these will whet the appetite for what promises to be a full and interesting day.

Following an overwhelming response to the SRA's call for papers, the workshop sessions will include two complementary papers.

There will be plenary sessions from several keynote speakers, including a presentation by Helen Bernard (BMRB) and Ann Harrop (Joseph Rowntree Foundation) entitled *'On the shelf? Dissemination of social research'*. They argue that if social research is really to make an impact, then good dissemination is not enough. Research must be more strategically targeted to influence key audiences.

The workshops focus on the key themes of organisation, practice and presentation. Those already confirmed include Dr Bryony Beresford and Dr Parvaneh Rabiee (SPRU, York University) whose paper *'Assessing the views of harder to reach disabled children and young people'* describes the challenges of working with these 'harder to reach' disabled children. On a similar theme, Dr Duncan Fuller (PEANuT, Northumbria University) will present *'Social research and participatory appraisal'* which draws upon the findings of a locally-funded project which explores the views of graffiti writers in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Ruth Gardener (Royal Holloway University and NSPCC) and Amanda Bunn (NSPCC) in the *'The life and results of a researcher'* will consider how social research impacts on the researcher's own health and well-being and what effect this has on results.

Margaret Godel (Oxford Brookes University) will be presenting *'Grassroots reality – how older people see it'* examining the roles of older people and researchers, as research partners, and how principles of participation, action and enabling can be carried through from proposal development to dissemination.

Dr Sarah Johnson (The Salvation Army) will be *'Responding to a challenge posed by homeless Don'*, to provide an overview of strategies adopted by the 'Homeless Places' research team to ensure that their research is of maximum value to 'the researched' as well as to policy-makers and practitioners working with vulnerable groups.

'Disseminating evaluation evidence – a case study of the evaluation of Connexions' will be presented by Beverly Bishop (DfES) and David Betteley (DfES) who will describe the responses to dissemination strategies used in the evaluation and explore possible conflicts between strategic evaluation and the goal of producing findings aimed at supporting delivery.

As researchers we are familiar with producing a written report with executive summary which is very much the 'industry standard'. But as William Solesbury (Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice, University of London) will show in *'Choosing Communication Media'* the range of available media is far wider and continually expanding.

Anne Corden and Roy Sainsbury (SPRU) in *'What is the impact of verbatim quotes in research and reports?'* will describe empirical work to test, among research participants and research users, the accessibility, acceptability and impact of different ways of including verbatim quotations.

The day will end with a panel on *'making an impact'* with commentators including Waqar Ahmed and Ivor Gaber.

The full programme will be on www.the-sra.org.uk and distributed to members as soon as it is finalised.

We look forward to seeing you at the conference.

SRA AGM

The AGM will take place on 1st December in London. Look out for papers being circulated by email in September and see online at www.the-sra.org.uk

report from the chair

Ceridwen Roberts

It has been a good summer for social research, social science and the SRA.

Top of the list was July's ESRC Research Methods Festival. Over 600 social scientists and researchers of all ages took part in a packed programme of diverse but uniformly high standard of papers and presentations on all aspects of research methods. The SRA had a stand and also sponsored a session for postgraduates on developing their careers. Many SRA members were present as paper givers, chairs or discussants. The whole event was rated a tremendous success with many requests for similar festival next summer (see page 7).

Next, over 100 social researchers attended the SRA Summer Event to consider how to evaluate area-based initiatives (see front page). It was particularly encouraging to see the wide spread of researchers and their commitment to good, meaningful research. And the party on the terrace afterwards was fun too!

Demand for training

In respond to demand, the SRA will run treble the usual number of courses this year. We receive continual requests for repeats of popular courses, for some to be run elsewhere in the UK, and from employers wishing our help to design bespoke training. We are particularly pleased to have added to our range of courses with data protection (sold out every time we run it) and media training aimed at more senior researchers. The Training Committee is now considering how the SRA should develop its training arm as the work is now more than can reasonably be organised by volunteers. We will announce progress in the next issue.

Seminars and conferences

Seminars and conferences continue to flourish, with large numbers attending our evening seminars. These provide unparalleled opportunity for SRA members to discuss the latest findings and methodological implications of major studies with the researchers (as well as meet one another). So if your research fits, do offer to do one.

In November, we run our annual joint event with the RSS – the Cathie Marsh Memorial Lecture – at which Mike Noble and his colleagues will talk about their 'Indices of Deprivation 2004'. We also warmly invite you to come to the Annual Conference on 1st December on 'Improving the IMPACT of Social Research' (see page 2). This promises to be bigger than ever, as the offer of papers has surpassed expectations and there will be much to learn from the plenary speakers.

SRA Scotland is more active than ever, and if you live in Ireland you may wish to contact Peter Humphreys who, with colleagues, plans to run events and training in the autumn (see page 5). Come on members in Wales – do you want to get together?

Public affairs

The social research community faces challenges in all directions at the moment. These include the debates about setting up ethical scrutiny infrastructure (see page 11) as well as trying to ensure that the new RAE round is set up to properly reflect the wider dissemination many of our members want or are required to do by funders.

Poor commissioning practice is still a very real problem, and our work on challenging this is gathering momentum under the new commissioning working party co-ordinated by Janet Lewis. The dissemination working party chaired by Mary Hickman has now met. Sonia Jackson is working with the group to collate and compare funders' and commissioners' policies and practices on research dissemination and utilisation. Data is being collected in September, with a consultative seminar planned for late 2004 or early 2005.

The ESRC's Strategic Framework is now out for consultation. The SRA is joining with the Academy of Social Sciences to hold a consultative seminar for senior social researchers in early September. What the ESRC does in developing training and the whole infrastructure of social science research in the UK is a crucial underpinning of our wider social research work and it's vitally important that the voice of the SRA is heard. As Adrian Alsop explains on page 9 everyone can contribute their views through their website.

In October, there will be another consultative seminar to discuss the ONS proposal to introduce a Continuous Population Survey to 'replace' the LFS, GHS and others (see page 7). This is a major change and SRA members need to think about the implications of these proposals, so do read the document and give us your views on 5th October.

Mark Abrams prize

There is still time to send in your entry and persuade colleagues to do so. Closing date is 1st October. We have had some early entries, but would love to be overwhelmed with evidence that British social researchers are doing theoretically informed empirical work which contributes to social policy. See our website for more details.

SRA and the office

The SRA executive is working hard to develop the SRA infrastructure. We hope to announce in our November issue that we are moving to a new and bigger office and appointing more paid staff. Suzanne Cohen's job has grown enormously, and she and the SRA officers need more paid support if we are to give you the services you want.

Promoting better research commissioning

Although the SRA produced an updated version of its 1994 *Commissioning Social Research* in 2002, there is still work to be done to promote these as the world of social research is now different. There are more people with little research experience involved in commissioning research and there is greater diversity. Many small organisations are now commissioning research and their staff are often uninformed and/or unsupported in this task.

In the May issue of SRA News, we outlined our plans to promote our commissioning guidelines as well as to consider good practice more generally. We were delighted by the enthusiastic response to these and the meeting we subsequently convened on 30 June.

Despite the tube strike, the meeting was well attended and participants shared ideas and considered next steps in promoting better research commissioning.

We decided on a number of actions. These include: drafting summary guidelines which are easier to read and apply; formulating a statement of best practice; setting up a dedicated website containing SRA and other good practice materials; and considering training on research commissioning.

We are now collecting material for the website and would welcome any contributions from SRA members.

We plan to meet again in September/October.

Contact: janet@jdlewis.freeserve.co.uk for details.

The SRA guidelines are on www.the-sra.org.uk

RESPECT: professional standards in social research

Along with partners from the UK, Belgium, Austria, Germany and Hungary, the SRA contributed to this major EU project looking at professional and ethical standards for European social research. The reasons for the project, process and outputs have been reported in previous newsletters (for example, November 2003). This information is available on the project website:

www.respectproject.org, along with copies of all reports (ethics, professional standards, data protection, intellectual property rights and a functional map of competencies for working on European projects). Most recently the User Guide has been added (and can be downloaded or purchased). This provides an overview of good practice in social research and is designed as an introduction to social research for the broader community of research users.

The SRA was invited to participate in the project due to its extensive experience in ethical issues. It was also thought important to have one partner that represented the breadth of social research, including those conducting, commissioning and using research. Ron Iphofen used his knowledge of ethical issues to work with the Institute for Employment Studies to develop the ethical part of the study. Ceridwen Roberts attended various events, and raised awareness of the role of an organisation such as the SRA.

As essential part of the project was wide consultation on the work being conducted and SRA members were a key group invited to participate. Individual members with particular expertise were consulted on various issues; the 2003 Summer Event was devoted to discussion of various parts of the project; and all members were invited to comment on the draft code at various points in its development.

The SRA is unique in Europe; no other country has an organisation with such wide-ranging membership or overarching role in social research. The profile of the SRA was raised through involvement in the project and presentations at various events (including to staff at the European Commission) about its role and activities. Interest has been expressed in developing a European SRA, however there needs to be drive and resources from somewhere to undertake such a massive task.

The SRA expertise in ethical issues has become more widely established, and there is interest from other organisations in, for example, the good practice guide on commissioning research. Data protection and intellectual property rights issues have been emphasised as areas in which the SRA can take an active role in the UK.

The RESPECT team hopes that the reports and website will remain a useful resource for members of the social research community.

Sally Dench, Institute for Employment Studies

Editorial Policy Statement

SRA News will include any copy that may be of interest to its readers in the social research community. We will notify you if we are unable to include an item. Copy submitted for publication is accepted on the basis that it may be edited to ensure coherence within the publication. The views expressed by individual contributors do no necessarily reflect those of the SRA.

SRA Ireland

By Peter Humphreys, SRA Executive

SRA members get going in Ireland

As many of you will know, over the past few months, a number of us have met at lunch times to see what could be done to help raise the profile of the SRA here in Ireland and improve the services available to members. For example, we are convinced that there is a real need for the provision locally of independent, quality research training, workshops, seminars and other events, as well as opportunities to network and to give social research a professional voice in formal consultation exercises in areas that affect our work.

On midsummer's day (21 June), and following the example set by our colleagues in Scotland, we decided that it was about time that SRA members in Ireland got going to see what could be done nearer home. We decided that to help move things forward further, we needed to be able to pool our expertise/experience and commit ourselves to seeing what we can achieve through the SRA in Ireland. We have formed a steering group, comprising:

Laurence Bond/Anne Timoney, Equality Authority
Anne Good/Eithne Fitzgerald, National Disability Authority
Sinéad Hanafin, National Children's Office
Peter Humphreys, Institute of Public Administration & SRA Executive
Helen Lahert, Comhairle
Jim Walsh, Combat Poverty Agency

Others will join us as we get going. Although we are all currently Dublin-based, we are very keen to make sure SRA Ireland reflects the geographical membership of the SRA as a whole on the island of Ireland (from Belfast to Cork to Limerick). As a specific target, one of our priorities is to organise a workshop in November on *Good Practice in Commissioning Social Research*. So watch this space for more on this and other plans.

National longitudinal study of children in Ireland

SRA Ireland is here to serve as best we can the needs of our members in Ireland. One of those needs is keeping in touch and we thought you would be very interested to learn about the new National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland.

The National Children's Office is currently in the process of commissioning a National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland. The Departments of Health & Children and Social & Family Affairs are jointly funding the study. The initial period of funding will be for seven years. Its aim is to study the factors that contribute to, or undermine, the well-being of children in contemporary Irish families, and, through this, contribute to the setting of effective and responsive policies relating to children and to the design of services for children and their families. The study objectives are to:

- Describe the lives of Irish children, to establish what is typical and normal as well as what is atypical and problematic
- Chart the development of Irish children over time, to examine the progress and well-being of children at critical periods from birth to adulthood
- Identify the key factors that, independently of others and interactively, most help or hinder children's development
- Establish the effect of early child experiences on later life
- Map dimensions of variation in children's lives
- Identify the persistent adverse effects that lead to social disadvantage and exclusion, educational difficulties, ill health and deprivation
- Obtain children's views and opinions on their lives
- Provide a bank of data on the whole child
- Provide evidence for the creation of effective and responsive policies and services for children and families.

The study will include two cohorts of children - a birth cohort of 10,000 children and a cohort of 8,000 nine year olds. The study will follow these children's lives yielding important information, inter alia, about the effectiveness of formal and informal supports to children and families. The closing date for submission of proposals was 27th August.

For further details contact: Dr Sinéad Hanafin, Head of Research, National Children's Office, Floor 1, St Martin's House, Waterloo Road, Dublin 4; Tel: 00343-1-2420000.

If you would like to get involved get in touch

If you are interested in knowing more, and even better would like to help, do get in touch with me at phumphreys@ipa.ie. Future generations, not to mention the Steering Group, will be in your debt!! Also let us know what you think…

SRA Ireland Contact:

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Participatory approaches to research on poverty: does it make for better research?

By Tina Haux, PhD Student at the University of Bath

Fran Bennett and Moraene Roberts presented the findings of their study of participatory approaches to poverty research[1] concentrating on who should be included; how people can participate in the research; and the aims of participatory research.

Main lessons were:
- To ensure that enough time is available: participatory research takes time.
- To ensure that sufficient funds are available, some of it in petty cash to reimburse participants immediately: participatory research, due to its evolving nature, requires financial resources.
- Time should be included for the different project members to get to know each other and to find common ground.
- The project should include aftercare, i.e. in feeding back change achieved through the research; by consolidating and validating what has been learned; and by giving participants something to hold on to.

The main benefit of the seminar was that both presenters had taken part in participatory research on poverty as researchers and also as research subjects. Hearing their views on those experiences; what had and had not worked; how it had felt; and what they had gained was enriching.

The British Lone Parent Cohort and their Children

By Adél Várnai of MORI

In June, Alan Marsh and Sandra Vegeris of the Policy Studies Institute presented findings from their *British Lone Parent Cohort and their Children study*, to both SRA members and non-members.

The study ran from 1991 to 2001, and aimed to discover whether different paths through lone parenthood led to different outcomes for the lone parents and their children. The three main factors focused on in assessing outcomes for the lone parents, were family formation (new partners, new children and children growing up); experiences of paid work; and changes in material well-being.

In the final year of the study, the children of the lone parents were the focus. Outcomes for them were examined in terms of physical well being, adjustment and behaviour, education; and for older children also patterns of work, benefit status, housing and family formation. Alan Marsh argued that the research disproved the myth popular in the 1980s that lone parents stay state-dependent for all their lives.

The full report is available on the Department for Work and Pensions website:
www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2003-2004/rrep209.asp

How Much Do Families Owe?

By Juliet Whitworth of the Local Government Association

In July, Steve McKay, Deputy Director of the Personal Finance Research Centre at the University of Bristol, talked about a recently-published report for the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) on levels of debt among British households.

The study involved secondary analysis of a range of data, including the Families and Children Study, the British Household Panel Study and, interestingly, the Study of Psychiatric Morbidity Among Adults Living in Private Households. Before discussing some of the key findings, Steve McKay talked about the reality of debt in Great Britain, as opposed to the 'media frenzy' about debt in recent times. Although there are rising levels of borrowing, with secured lending growing faster than unsecured, total wealth remains much larger. Around 80% of debt is mortgage, and mortgage repossessions are actually down. However, he did note that Citizens Advice Bureaux are reporting that the number of inquiries about debt is now increasing.

Steve went on to talk about the concept of debt. There are several variations in definition. For instance, the Bank of England classes debt as any borrowings; Elaine Kempson, at the University of Bristol, often looks at debt as borrowings that are in arrears or where the borrower has difficulties repaying. To illustrate this, at any one time, 50% of the population have credit, but 95% are finding it manageable to pay it back.

Steve then reported and discussed a range of findings from the research including:

- Having even a small amount of savings drastically decreases the risk of arrears
- The lowest income group is not the group most likely to be in arrears
- Tenants are more likely to have arrears
- Arrears on household bills are more persistent than on consumer credit.

Characteristics of Families in Debt and the Nature of Indebtedness, is available from the DWP website:
www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2003-2004/rrep211.asp

[1]Bennett, F and Roberts, M (2004) *From input to influence: Participatory approaches to research and inquiry ninto poverty*, York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

sra research briefing

News from the Research Methods Programme

The Research Methods Festival website now holds a full set of overheads and summaries of papers: **www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/festival**. It is very likely that another Festival will be held in late June/early July 2006. As soon as this has been agreed, we will be seeking your suggestions for themes and topics.

The training bursaries scheme has now been extended to include contract researchers working in HEIs. The next call for ESRC Training Bursaries administered by the programme will go out on 1 October 2004, with a closing date of 31 October. Successful candidates will be notified by the end of November. Details of eligibility are available at **www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/bursaries**

We are holding an Open Meeting on the Samples of Anonymised Records from the 2001 Census, future census-type activities and procedures for access to microdata on Thursday 30 September 2004, The Royal Statistical Society, London. See **www.ccsr.ac.uk/sars/events/**

Ruth Durrell
Administrator, ESRC Research Methods Programme
Tel: 0161 275 4891

Local government research by email

The Local Government Association has introduced a new e-bulletin. Each month it will provide details of recently published or current research related to local government, with short summaries and links. Also, it highlights useful data and statistics. It can be found on www.lga.gov.uk/research.asp, under LGA Research Updates. You can ask to be sent the monthly e-bulletin by sending details of your name, organisation, address, telephone number and e-mail address to paula.smith@lga.gov.uk and asking to be added to the 'research e-bulletin mailing list'.

Call for papers on higher education research

The Society for Research in Higher Education is running a conference in Bristol on 14 December for postgraduate students. The event will give students the opportunity to present their work in a supportive and stimulating environment. The organisers welcome papers and posters on any topic relevant to higher education. Submit your abstract of 300-500 words or an outline of your poster to Lisa.Lucas@Bristol.ac.uk. The closing date for submissions is 30 September. Further details of the conference are on **www.srhe.ac.uk**

Government research services framework agreement

Inland Revenue in partnership with HM Customs & Excise and other Government Departments is currently advertising for external research service providers to express their interest in joining a Framework Agreement. The departments have wide-ranging requirements for a variety of market and social research services. If your organisation would like to be considered, please see the Internet advertisement at *ted.publications.eu.int* or request the pre-qualification pack from Caroline Dickens (0115 974 0410; Caroline.Dickens@ir.gsi.gov.uk) quoting reference CP/CONSUL/03/05.

Continuous Population Survey

The ONS has published a formal consultation paper about the Continuous Population Survey (CPS) on its website. The consultation paper details a proposal to integrate the five continuous government surveys on which ONS leads, and replace them with one integrated CPS, starting in January 2008. The five surveys to be integrated are the Labour Force Survey and associated boosts; the Annual Population Survey, formerly known as the NeSS Survey; the General Household Survey; the Expenditure and Food Survey and; the National Statistics Omnibus Survey.

The aim of the new survey is to provide better value for money; increase the precision of many existing survey outputs; and, create a range of new outputs including inter-censal estimates of key socio-demographic variables at sub-regional level. This is the largest continuous household survey ever run in this country. Comments are invited on the proposal by Friday October 15th 2004. Information about the CPS including the consultation paper can be found at **www.statistics.gov.uk/cps**

> **The SRA is holding a consultation on the CPS on 5th October at the Nuffield Foundation, 28 Bedford Square, London.**
> **Speakers: Nikki Bennett and Rob Bumpstead of ONS.**
> **Further details from the SRA admin office.**
> **THESE ARE CRUCIAL ISSUES DO COME AND GIVE YOUR VIEWS**

Expenditure and food survey

The Expenditure and Food Survey (EFS), undertaken by the ONS since 2002, resulted from the merger of the long-running Family Expenditure Survey (FES) and National Food Survey (NFS). Royal Statistical Society, Social Statistics Section has organised a talk to provide an overview of the merger and cover a number of key current issues for the survey, covering both design questions and issues about the survey's outputs (including access to data).

The meeting is open to all and free of charge and will be held on 21 September 2004, at 5pm (tea from 4:30) at RSS, 12 Errol Street, London EC1Y 8LX

For more information please contact: Keith Dugmore, dugmore@demographic.co.uk, 020 7834 0966

Statistics by text

ONS is piloting a 'statistics by text service' until the end of September. All you have to do is text a key word to 0779 601 2034. The key words are: inflation, earnings, GDP, travel, population, retail sales, labour, help. Key words are based on the most popular searches. Calls charged at your standard rate for sending and receiving texts. As this is a pilot service until the end of September, please send feedback to info@statistics.gov.uk

Views on ageing

The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology has set up a review of 'Scientific Aspects of Ageing'. It is inviting comments on: the biological processes of ageing; the application of research in technology and design to improve the quality of life of older people, and the coordination of ageing research, priorities, capability and links to policy. This is a chance for you to express your views on the future shape of age-related research and how research might benefit older people. For more information see **www.equal.ac.uk.**

British Market Research Bureau leader to head Policy Studies Institute

Malcolm Rigg, former managing director of the British Market Research Bureau (BMRB), is to be the new director of the Policy Studies Institute (PSI). Malcolm's directorship of the PSI will start in October 2004 when Jim Skea, the PSI's current director, will formally take up the research directorship of the United Kingdom Energy Research Centre (UKERC).

The Policy Studies Institute is one of the oldest and most respected social policy research institutes in the UK. Currently it has research groups working in the areas of employment, the environment and social policy. Since 1998, the PSI has been a wholly owned independent subsidiary of the University of Westminster.

BMRB International opens Scottish office

BMRB International opened a new office in Scotland in June. Ian Binnie, who left BMRB in 2002 to work for the Scottish Executive heads up the office. BMRB has been winning increasing amounts of work in Scotland and setting up this office is in recognition of this. Projects include research for the Scottish Executive and NHS Health Scotland.

BMRB Scotland
124-125 Princes Street
Edinburgh EH2 4AD

Tel. 0131 225 3799
Mob: 0781 801 2961
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New survey on crime in Scotland

BMRB has been awarded a three-year contract by the Scottish Executive to carry out the new Scottish Crime and Victimisation Survey. About 27,500 randomly selected adults in Scotland will be interviewed by telephone each year. Like the British Crime Survey, which BMRB also conducts for the Home Office, the main aim of the survey is to measure trends in household and personal crime as reported by victims themselves. The new survey represents a major shift in design, methodology and sample size compared with previous Scottish Crime Surveys, which have been conducted face-to-face with samples of 5,000. Fieldwork for the survey started in June.

See **www.bmrb.co.uk** for details

Research Briefing

If there's anything you'd like to publicise on these pages please send details to the SRA admin office. You can also receive more frequent briefings by subscribing to the SRA's email bulletin.

See www.the-sra.org.uk for details.

ESRC Consults on Key Strategic Priorities

By Adrian Alsop Director for Research, Training and Development, ESRC

Many members of SRA will be familiar with the ESRC's seven priority themes. However, the Council is now moving on – not least because the themes did not do justice to the full range of activities, for example in developing research methods. The Council's new approach to priority setting will focus on four areas: capacity, research, engagement and performance. This ordering is deliberate since without capacity – first-rate people, skills, methods and data – there can be no path-breaking research or sensible engagement with policy and practice. And while the themes had the advantage of presenting a wide ranging 'shop window' for social science research, in practice they tended to exclusively promote the use of research programmes as the vehicle for Council to express its priorities.

In contrast, the new key strategic priorities can embrace any area of the Council's activities. So, for example, in the research area, Council could decide that responsive mode research should be given higher priority, and prompt the Research Grants Board to consider ways of developing that provision accordingly, (perhaps through very large grants or more small grants). Moreover, it is not simply a question of prioritising between the different areas, many issues run across the four areas – could a more coherent ESRC provision that links capacity, research and engagement could be especially advantageous on particular issues? And with each heading should more priority be given to e.g. development of skills or data resources? Or research on economic performance or health behaviours; engagement with policy and practice or the international research community? Under the performance heading, the ESRC is concerned about how far we should emphasise measurement of the international standing of UK social science or improving the effectiveness of the service we provide from the Swindon Office.

The SRA has been formally invited to respond to this consultation. This is one part of a consultation process that involves universities, learned societies, leading international social scientists, government departments, business and the voluntary sector- as well as the directors of ESRC investments, and our board and college members. If we can find a way through the methodological challenges of the area, we would also like to provide a way for individual citizens to participate as well. Individual views are also welcome via the forthcoming feature on our website –or email me directly. It will not be possible to respond to every submission, but we will read them all and publish an overall account of the views received and the Council's response.

The comments received on the consultation process will be discussed by Council in October, and the key strategic priorities implemented from April 2005. The key strategic priorities will be established for at least two and more often further years, reflecting the need for sustained investment.

I do hope the SRA, collectively and individually, will want to take advantage of the current consultation. After all, Council has a limited budget and investing is one way that precludes spending the same sums in a different way. Finally, I would like to stress that one commitment that will <u>not</u> change with the new strategy is ESRC's commitment to quality, relevance and independence.

Contact Adrian at: Adrian.alsop@esrc.ac.uk

ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM)

By Jackie Powell, Head of Social Work Studies

The ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) was formally established in April. This initiative forms one part of the ESRC's wider strategy aimed at strengthening the research methods capacity of the UK social science community. The NCRM is made up of a co-ordinating hub at the University of Southampton, to be joined in April 2005 by a series of nodes around the UK. The Hub draws upon the expertise of an interdisciplinary team with a wide range of methodological perspectives.

The overall mission of the NCRM is to provide a strategic focal point for the development of an integrated national research, training and capacity-building programme aimed at:

• promoting a step change in the quality and range of methodological skills and techniques used by the UK social science community; and
• providing support for, and dissemination of, existing methodological innovation and excellence within the UK.

For more information on the National Centre for Research Methods visit the website at **www.ncrm.ac.uk** or contact Becky Clarke on 02380 594539 or info@ncrm.ac.uk.

Change in Employer Practices Survey 2002

By Michael White, Policy Studies Institute

The Future of Work Research Programme was launched in 1998 by the Economic and Social Research Council to provide current evidence as a replacement for millennial speculation about the changing world of work. Among the varied studies conducted under this banner[1] were two national surveys, the first of employees *(Working in Britain 2000)* and the second - providing the focus for this report - of employers. *Change in Employer Practices Survey 2002* (CEPS-02) is a telephone survey with management respondents, covering 2000 British workplaces with five or more employees. Its special feature is its focus on change and especially its attempt to capture newly emergent changes at the workplace.

The rationale underlying CEPS-02 was that a great deal of the change taking place now was scarcely envisaged in the mid-90s. This makes it difficult to assess change by the usual repeat cross-section comparisons, for instance through the Workplace Employee Relations Surveys (WERS) series. Inevitably this would involve quite lengthy time lags: the previous WERS took place in 1998 and the next is due in 2004. Moreover, emergent facets of change - such as the use of computer technology to monitor employee performance, or the restructuring of individual workspace - were not covered in the 1998 WERS. There was a role for a survey, complementary to WERS, which would address such issues as part of a review of current changes in workplace practices.

The research team decided at the outset that the method best suited to this objective was a computer-assisted telephone survey, permitting a reasonably large, national sample at moderate cost, and a compressed fieldwork period. The challenge was to devise a set of questions which was succinct enough to fit within a telephone interview, yet covered a wide range of workplace topics. Some of the topics were so new that there was no previous experience of how to draft questions about them. Even after a long questionnaire design phase, piloting was essential. However, the basic approach to assessing change proved to work well with management respondents. This was to ask consistently about change over the past three-year period, and - when asking about the future - to restrict attention to management's plans for the coming 12 months. To anchor the change data, we also asked descriptive questions about workforce numbers and about the current use of human resource practices and ICT systems.

The research team only went out to tender once the survey questionnaire had been drafted, so as to give the tendering organizations a realistic idea of the task. The tender was awarded to IFF Research, which has a long experience of employer surveys including on various human resource topics. They recommended use of Yell Data as the sampling frame, with the sample drawn within a matrix of size bands and industry sectors. The target number of interviews per cell was set so as to be approximately representative of shares of employment. Sample weights were subsequently calculated from the Inter-departmental Business Register.

A limitation of employer telephone interviews is the attainable response rate, given that managers are the target of many commercial inquiries. Here, the achieved response was approximately 55 per cent. An important issue for the research team, therefore, was the reliability of the information collected. To assess this, comparisons were made wherever possible with other data sources, including the *Working in Britain 2000* employee survey referred to above. These comparisons were generally reassuring. For instance, estimates of the proportions of employees using ICT in their jobs were closely similar between the two sources. Again, the CEPS-02 estimate of employee coverage by unions was within one percentage point of the comparable WERS estimate.

The survey has yielded a plethora of new findings about change in the workplace, including many that are striking. The findings show, for instance, that the traditional forms of workplace 'flexibility' (such as using temporary or casual employees) are reaching a ceiling, while the newly popular forms of flexibility involve outsourcing and/or interchangeable, adaptable employees. The widely-held assumption that employers have retreated from offering career paths is thoroughly rejected. Human resource management practices such as appraisals, team-working, pay-for-performance, and communications and consultation, are spreading more rapidly than previously supposed, even to many small workplaces. The survey also reveals that ICT is already being widely used for continuous monitoring of employee performance, which may become a source of conflict. Against a general picture of vigorous change in British workplaces, work-life balance policies stand out as a kind of management blind-spot where advances are slight.

Surveying recent change is pointless unless the results can be brought to the marketplace while they are fresh. The 2000 participating managers received a four-page summary of key findings within three months of the survey's completion, and a report of selected key findings was prepared equally quickly by Robert Taylor, the eminent journalist, and widely distributed by the ESRC[2] . The full findings and conclusions of the study appeared in book form in May 2004[3] , and the dataset is available through the UK Data Archive.

[1] Details of the research programme can be found at www.leeds.ac.uk/esrcfutureofwork

[2] Robert Taylor wrote six reports on various aspects of the future of work programme, and these can be obtained through the web link given above.

[3] White, M., S., Mills, C. and Smeaton, D. (2004) Managing to Change? British workplaces and the future of work, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Research on University Research Ethics Committees

By Anthea Tinker and Vera Coomber

The background to the research

Researchers and funders are paying increasing attention to ethical issues in research. In order to find out what was happening in universities we obtained funding from the Nuffield Foundation to undertake a national survey. The focus was on research with 'human participants' often referred to as 'healthy volunteers'. It therefore included research undertaken by disciplines such as pharmacy, nutrition and physiotherapy, which involves, for example, taking blood, testing food products on people and measuring muscle strength. It also included social science research.

The key question was: 'To what extent do Universities undertake ethical scrutiny of research, and if so how?' Although the focus was on Research Ethics Committees (RECs) the wider perspective was also considered. So we undertook a postal survey of all UK universities and follow up telephone interviews with a sample.

General findings

The majority of universities were aware of the need for ethical scrutiny for research (and many of those who said that they were developing scrutiny mechanisms may have subsequently done so), in some cases practice seems to lag behind awareness. While there were some very good examples of good practice there were also some poor ones.

Three quarters of the universities that responded had a formal mechanism for scrutiny and four in five of these had a Research Ethics Committee. For some, this was a fairly recent initiative as only a quarter were set up before 1990, one third in the 1990s and the rest since 2000. While nearly all covered both staff and postgraduate student research not all covered undergraduates. There was some evidence from the telephone interviews that not all disciplines were coming to the REC and this is given weight by the results of the question on number of applications seen by RECs in the previous year. Half of the valid answers showed that there were only between one and fifty applications per year. Without undertaking more detailed research on what would be a reasonable number of applications this number appears very low.

The committees, their staff and way of working

Four in five university RECs had lay members but under half had student members. Four in five had an administrator but only one in five of these were full time. Nearly all the universities allowed delegated power for minor amendments and most for urgent research applications.

One research ethics committee or a number?

A central issue is how to ensure that there is appropriate ethical scrutiny throughout the University and that systems are seen to be 'fair' and sufficiently flexible to deal with different kinds of research. One third of the universities had one central REC while two thirds had more than one. Experience of these was very mixed and there was no evidence whether or not levels of scrutiny at devolved level were the same.

Were there any special procedures to deal with the social sciences?

Two thirds of those who answered this question said that there was not and that applications were considered with the rest while one third said that there were special arrangements. These consisted of a variety of methods such as a school/faculty/departmental committee. In the remainder of the cases, it was much vaguer and included 'working group' and reference to 'external codes of practice and guidelines'. Professional guidelines were mentioned by a number of respondents and those by the British Psychological Society appeared to be widely used and appreciated. Indeed psychology has sometimes seemed to have led the way in having well thought out procedures.

Recommendations

There are a host of recommendations which include:
- A need to heighten awareness in universities of the importance of ethical issues in research
- More guidance and support for ethics training for researchers, students and REC members
- Funders and other bodies such as the Higher Education Funding Council should consider additional funding to cover the costs of ethical scrutiny procedures
- Universities should consider seriously whether there is need for a full time administrator, how frequently REC should meet, how they can consider and process applications that satisfies independent ethical scrutiny but is not too bureaucratic, and how independence is to be achieved
- There is a lack of clarity about the scrutiny of student research and this needs further discussion. If the draft recommendations of the Doyal report (2004) are accepted, they will have major implications in terms of finance and time and these need to be examined
- Attention should be drawn to the burgeoning research taking place outside universities and the NHS system of Local Research Ethics Committees such as in independent Research Institutes.

The full report is to be published by the Nuffield Foundation in mid September and will also be available online. For further information contact anthea.tinker@kcl.ac.uk

Reference
Doyal report (2004) The Ethical Governance and Regulation of Student Projects: A Draft Proposal, DH

Anthea Tinker is Professor of Social Gerontology, King's College London and also chairs the College Research Ethics Committee. Vera Coomber was Research Associate at KCL.

sra comment

ARVAC: Using Research to Promote Effective Community Action

By Fiona Poland, Vice Chair, The Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector (ARVAC)

As a sociologist and community researcher who has been a member of both ARVAC and the SRA for many years, I have valued what they have enabled me to bring to my work with community and voluntary organisations in Manchester, North Wales and East Anglia. I have found both organisations useful for building skills and networks that bridge neighbourhoods, agencies and academia.

ARVAC was founded in 1978. Members come community and voluntary groups and from universities and research institutes under the directorship of Lesley Symes. Outreach worker, Giovanna Speciale, provides training and facilitation in basic research methods for small community groups in Greater London, the latest in a series of such projects run by ARVAC in various UK locations over recent years. Information officer, Stefan Simanowitz, produces a quarterly bulletin for members and provides information on community sector research. We hold conferences and workshops – often in collaboration with other organisations.

ARVAC's mission is 'to promote effective community action through research'. It aims to:

• Act as a resource to people interested in research in or on community organisations
• Promote and help develop effective and appropriate forms of research in or on community organisations
• Encourage and facilitate networking and collaboration between people working in this field
• Ensure that the findings of research in and on community organisations are made available to policy makers at all levels
• Play a role in identifying gaps in knowledge of the community sector and the need for further research.

This reflects a change in focus. When the organisation was founded, it worked to support research more generally in the voluntary sector. However, we came to realise that the research needs of community research may require more specific attention. Community groups and community activity may often be less easily recognised and acknowledged by formal funders, organisations and researchers. They may, therefore, need particular support in accessing and using research to support their activities. They may need to use research to raise the profile of their community, lobby policy makers, develop the right services, involve local people or apply for funding. ARVAC now concentrates more of its information-sharing, training and project development work in addressing these needs. Recent conferences and seminars have included such topics as "Indicators of Community – how they work in practice" and "Transorganizations and the Limits of Conventional Organization Theory" run in collaboration with various organisations including the Community

Development Foundation with whom we run an annual joint conference.

Our outreach projects across the UK have now supported over three hundred community groups to carry out their own research by running training events, often with local umbrella organisations, to work with groups to identify research needs; plan research; carry out data collection and analysis; and write up and present research – as well as using findings in different ways. These organisations have gone on to:

• Carry out needs assessments
• Consult with users
• Map provision
• Identify gaps in services
• Evaluate their work
• Conduct participatory, peer and user led research.

Our publications have included reports of research as well as information to support research and research training in and with communities and community groups. The most recent of these is *Community Research – Getting Started* a resource pack to guide individuals and groups wanting to get started with a community project. This draws on the many lessons learned from these outreach projects. Copies can be ordered from our office and cost £30 (£15 for small groups and ARVAC members).

National chair, Colin Rochester, is also Director of the Centre for Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Management at the University of Surrey, Roehampton. Our committee has a membership which brings together individual members and also often reflects our links with other research-interested organisations such as the Institute for Volunteering Research, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, and for many years included a representative from the Social Research Association. We would be very happy to continue such links to increase skills and interest in community research.

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Who Do You Think You Are?

Sarah Castrell, Associate Director of MORI gives her thoughts on researching hard-to-reach audiences, particularly the deaf community.

Qualitative research with so-called 'hard to reach groups' may have to rethink ways in which disabilities are defined, to ensure that the right voices are heard.

MORI research for Ofcom recently canvassed the views of deaf and hearing-impaired telecommunications users. The research brought to the fore key questions - what defines a hard to reach group? Who does the defining? And how does this affect the research?

Ofcom needed to approach profoundly deaf signers who use British Sign Language (BSL), profoundly deaf signers who do not use BSL, and hearing impaired consumers, all who had experience of using textphone services.

However, formal definitions of 'deaf' and 'hearing impaired' did not entirely correspond with how individual respondents defined themselves as people. This meant original ideas about sample and methods were revised as real responses emerged. Recruitment in 'the deaf community' actually revealed a *number* of communities; loose and tight networks of association; and many different individual identities.

Sign of the times

Ofcom needed to make provision for both 'signers' and 'non-signers'. Royal National Institute for Deaf people (RNID) figures number first-language signers at only 50,000 to 70,000, which implies there are many who are 'not signers'.

However, our respondents asserted that they were sometimes signers and sometimes not; some used signs, but were not 'signers'; some were lip-readers who supplemented their lip reading with signing. Some were profoundly deaf, some had a 'deaf identity' though they had some level of hearing ability. In the group discussion itself, with sign interpreters, various participants chose to use a 'BSL/SSL identity', by signing to us; but were also able to use an 'English based identity' by using lip-reading, at different points in the same meeting. Some were adamant they are multi-lingual, and responded on the basis of whichever language they feel most fluent in that circumstance; which changed the dynamic and outcome of the group.

The identity adopted was a choice made by the individual, based on condition and degree of deafness; but also on context, self-image, association to different groups, and politics. Importantly, this changed according to the nature of discussion.

Political choice

This research also highlighted the difficulty in making provision for 'signers' and 'non signers' given that the response to provision may be mediated by political concerns as well as communication concerns. Profoundly deaf signers responded more rapidly to recruitment invitations, in greater numbers, and the hard of hearing community was less vocal and visible. Many who were hearing impaired did not want to be associated with a 'deaf community', feeling that this cut them off from their hearing counterparts, and so were not keen to participate. This meant that they were harder to reach. Those who *were* at the heart of this 'deaf community' were often also wary about the research – would it show their community in an appropriate light, and was it really seeking to benefit them? Some respondents actively checked up on us to make sure that we were representing this community properly. Their response to ideas shown during research was correspondingly more critical.

Flexible identity

The recruitment process and the research itself revealed that we may have to rethink ways to define disabilities so that research is more effective. People have power over the way they chose to define themselves and they develop techniques to express these different identities. If the research design imposes its own categories on to people it becomes easier to miss these so called 'hard to reach' groups. We often believe and behave as if people have a fixed and true identity that is their essence. When in actual fact all identity is a shifting, temporary construction that morphs when confronted with different situations. The success in recruiting hard to reach groups largely depends on the type of questions asked, the integration of the researcher with the target and the ability to be flexible about definitions during the process itself. One man's hard to reach group may be another's next door neighbour.

For more information about MORI's recruitment and qualitative project design for hard-to-reach targets, contact Gayatri Ganesh and Sarah Castell on 0207 347 3000. See also **www.mori.com**

We welcome short (up to 750 words) articles about interesting new research or comments about particular research issues.

Please submit to:

admin@the-sra.org.uk

sra reviews

Books/reports for review

The Unwritten Rules of PhD Research
Gordon Rigg and Marian Petre
Open University Press

Successful Research Careers: a practical guide
Sara Delamont and Paul Atkinson
Open University Press

Understanding Research for Social Policy and Practice: Themes, methods and approaches
Edited by Saul Becker and Alan Bryman
The Policy Press

Evaluation of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power
Sarah del Tufo and Lucy Gaster
The Evaluation Trust/Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Employment transitions of older workers: the role of flexible employment in maintaining labour market participation and promoting job quality
Stephen Lissenburgh and Deborah Smeaton
The Policy Press

Qualitative Research in Sociology
Amir B. Marvasti
Sage Publications

Overcoming disadvantage: An agenda for the next 20 years
IPPR, Social Market Foundation, Policy Exchange, Scottish Council Foundation and Institute of Welsh Affairs, Introduction by Nicholas Timmins
Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Race and Social Analysis
Caroline Knowles
Sage Publications

From Input to Influence: Participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty
Fran Bennett with Moraene Roberts
Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Need to Know: Social Science Research Methods
Lisa J. McIntyre
Open University Press

Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process (3rd Edition)
Tim May
Open University Press

Sociology: A Critical Approach
Kenneth J Neubeck and Davita Silfen Glasberg
McGraw Hill

The Sociologically Examined Life: Pieces of the Conversation
Michael Schwalbe
McGraw Hill

Involving the public in NHS, public health, and social care research: Briefing notes for researchers
Edited by Roger Steel
Involve Support Unit

If you would like a copy of any of the books/reports listed below all you have to do is write a short review of no more than 300 words. In return, you get to keep the reviewed item.

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sra reviews

Religious Trends 4

Reviewed by Jim McManus

Recent years have seen an increasing UK trend in application of demographic and statistical information, by faiths and their theologians. The work of Leslie Frances at the University of Wales and Robin Gill at Canterbury are part of an ever-increasing trend of theologians using social research methods. This parallels an established trend in the US and Europe.

Religious Trends is the latest in a series published by the Christian Research Association, with Peter Brierley, a respected former government statistician, at its helm. This issue has a special Scottish church census section and each volume refers to the previous volumes. Coming as it does from an Evangelical Christian stable where it has earned enormous respect, it is preoccupied with Christianity. Fair enough, but personally I feel this is a huge limitation to the volume. Non-Christian faiths warrant nine pages in total, less when one realises that churches, which don't hold the doctrine of the Trinity, are lumped with non-Christian faiths. For me this carried unhelpful overtones of triumphalist point-scoring and it annoyed the non-theologians I asked to read it. Some of the statistical projections were, for me, open to question. I found the methods for the estimate of 35 Satanists bizarre and faintly ridiculous, however logical they may appear.

Whingeing aside, the book is designed – paginated section by section – to be as user-friendly as possible. There is much of worth. The volume summarises research and considers church adherence and joining and leaving religion. There is useful coverage of the census and analysis of figures on ministry and those in training. Commentary, however, sometimes seems to go beyond the data, and some of the generalisations made are done on surveys commissioned by a range of Christian churches, partly because of the continuing lack of a comprehensive single national data source on this. The bibliography of recent research reports, which sometimes feels a bit like a convenience sample of what the editors have read, still has some excellent sources.

Maybe ONS will take seriously the need for a more inclusive volume in this vein, or maybe I've just joined the United Free Church of Porcine Floatation (Clergy 1, Members 1 [at extra time].

Jim McManus is Head of Themes & Policies at Groundwork UK, a social researcher and a Catholic theologian

Because it's worth it: A practical guide to conducting economic evaluations in the social welfare field

Reviewed by Jim McManus

One of my academic heroes once told me that economic evaluators who say they don't keep a basic text in economic evaluation are lying. She recommended BMJ publishing's Elementary Economic Evaluation because there was nothing better at its level in the field. With one or two serious reservations I think that's changed. This book is more readable, less pompous and seeks to inform the reader rather than showing off the writer's omniscience.

It isn't designed for those for whom doing an economic evaluation is a diverting hobby over tea and biscuits, but 'newbies' and those of us who have to do it but fear the phrase 'economic evaluation' more than dental fillings without anaesthesia.

It has useful case study material and points to essential sources on unit costs. It's good on explaining different types of economic evaluation and the principles and starting points. It has a reasonable checklist at the back for evaluating evaluations. Disappointingly, given its title, it's less good at project planning, and some other 'how to' aspects which someone coming to this for the first time really needs. Bits of the chapter on outcome measurement were skimmed over in almost unseemly haste. The lack of formulae in a 'how to' guide is also a real pain. At £15.95 its 78 pages are a little less than I would want.

These deficiencies can be met by consulting Donaldson & Scriven's (2003) *Evaluating Social Programs and Problems,* Drummond et al's (2000) *Methods for the economic evaluation of health care programmes* or my favourite blast from the past Pearce and Nash's (1981) *The Social Appraisal of Projects*.

Until someone finally sits down and writes a really user-friendly and comprehensive "how to" guide to an economic evaluation, with accompanying CD-Rom of project templates and other essential aids, this book will deserve a place. At least it may help us convince ourselves that economic evaluations are neither the work of the Devil nor what social researchers do when they're too boring to do statistics.

Money, choice and control: The financial circumstances of early retirement

Sue Arthur (2003)
The Policy Press in association with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Bristol
ISBN 1 86134 476 7 46pp £13.95

Reviewed by Patrick Carroll, PAPRI

This reports on some qualitative research on a sample drawn from people who had taken part in the Family Resources Survey (FRS) between April 2000 and March 2001. 'The sample was designed so that we could select people who had moved out of work during their fifties (or early sixties for men), and who were in different types of financial situation following their withdrawal from work.' Of the 56 in the sample there were 28 men and 28 women, 21 couples and 14 single people. They had retired at ages between 48 and 62 and this retirement had taken place from around 12 months to over10 years before the time of the interviews.

The sample responses were divided into two broad groupings according to whether or not they had low or high levels of control in deciding when to retire. The low level group were forced to retire for reasons of redundancy or ill health. The high level group tended to be people on relatively high incomes and who were moving onto private pensions, but some had also been offered an early retirement package or were retired for health reasons. Even those who had retired more involuntarily came to accept retirement as affordable: 'state benefits could leave them in a situation which was not very different from when they were earning.'

Couples all seemed to have discussed their retirement and come to an amicable agreement on the issue. Early retirement had apparently been financially feasible for them. If this research were to be repeated in a few years, one would expect a sample drawn from a later cohort to be more adversely affected by divorce and re-partnering and more financially challenged by retrenchment in British pension provision.

Feminist Sociology

Sara Delamont (2003)
Sage Publications
ISBN 0 7619 7255 2

Reviewed by Ayo Mansaray, Institute of Education, University of London

This is a brilliant and mature work of sociology which attempts to survey the contribution of feminist perspectives and to locate these within theoretical debates regarding post-modernism. Sara Delamont is well placed to undertake such a task, as a leading chronicler and participant in the controversies she discusses. The book does not shy away from the difficulty of demarcating the fuzzy boundaries of its terrain; in other words, distinguishing feminist sociology from feminist perspectives in other disciplines and from the sociology of gender or women studies, and its relationship to what Delamont refers to throughout as 'malestream' sociology.

The main argument is that feminist sociologies have tremendously enriched the subject as a whole, in terms of theory, methodology and empirical innovation; for example, opening up new areas of study such as housework, care and emotional labour - topics that are a staple on any undergraduate course, and by challenging the quantitative strangle-hold on sociology. However, she claims that feminist sociologies 'are more subversive of the dominant paradigm' (p1) and consequently have been ghettoised. Delamont eloquently shows how early, and current, feminist sociologists struggled at every stage to obtain academic posts in universities; to be cited; and even to be read. She notes a resurgent 'male hysteria' which blames feminism, amongst other things, for the 'crisis' in sociology.

There is a fascinating discussion of sociology's founding 'fathers' and 'mothers' and how sociology re-imagines them. Whilst ably demonstrating the case for founding 'mothers' she also examines feminists who have engaged with the 'canonical fathers' (Marx, Weber, Parsons etc.).

This is a wonderfully written book that is both absorbing and critical. Delamont steers a delicate path through some of the factional disputes within feminism, always with a clear view of the larger picture. This book deserves to be widely read and cited.

dates for your diary

SRA TRAINING DAYS

LONDON

- 15 September: Introduction to Qualitative Analysis

- 20 October: Introduction to Focus Groups

- 18 November: Introduction to Cognitive Methods

All London training days will be held at the London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London, N7 6PA.

EDINBURGH

- 28 September: Understanding Sampling

To be held at Edinburgh Training Centre, St Mary's Street.

SRA SEMINARS

LONDON

- 17 September: day seminar: joint SRA/ESRC: The Impact of Social Science Research on Social Policy: A European, Cross-National View. See www.xnat.org.uk/seminarhtml

- 5 October at 5.00pm: Continuous Population Survey: a consultation

- 27 September at 5.00pm: Time and How We Use It: The UK time use survey

- 18 October at 5.00pm: The Citizen Information Project: opening the door to greater linkage in social research?

SRA EVENTS

LONDON

- 29 November: Cathie Marsh Memorial Lecture: Indices of Deprivation 2004
Note change to date
Venue: RSS, Errol Street,
Keynote speaker: Mike Noble, University of Oxford

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

- 1 December: Improving the Impact of Social Research

For further details of all SRA events contact Suzanne Cohen at admin@the-sra.org.uk or see www.the-sra.org.uk

SHORT COURSES AND SEMINARS

European Cross-National Research and Policy

- 17 September: The Impact of Social Science Research on Social Policy: A European Cross-National View

This is the fifth in an ESRC-funded series of seminars. It concentrates on the link between social science research and policy developments and looks at the ways in which academic researchers can ensure the knowledge they generate is relevant to policy users and wider society.

Venue: London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Details: **www.xnat.org.uk**

Association for Survey Computing

- 30 September: **Mobile Computing** at

Will explore the opportunities and limitations of the mobile mode of data collection.

Venue: Imperial College, London

Details: ASC Administrator: Diana Elder, ASC, PO Box 60, Chesham, Bucks HP5 3QH, UK
Tel and Fax: 0494 793033,
Email: admin@asc.org.uk
www.asc.org.uk

University of Reading SSC Courses In Applied Statistics

- 27 September: Using your Statistical Software Better

- 28-29 September (two-day course): Good Tables with MS-Excel and more

- 4-5 October (two-day course: A Review of Basic Statistics

- 6 October: What Sample Size Do I Need?

The Statistical Services Centre offers a wide variety of courses for a range of audiences. Only a selection is listed above. Aims to provide the skills necessary for dealing with particular problems, with the emphasis on the practical application of statistics.

Details: Statistical Services Centre, The University of Reading, Tel: 0118 378 8689, Fax: 0118 975 3169 statistics@reading.ac.uk
www.rdg.ac.uk/ssc/

Lancaster University Centre for Applied Statistics in conjunction with Information Systems Services - Statistics Short Courses

- 7-8 October: Mathematics for Statistics

- 14-15 October: Excel for Statistics

- 21-22 October: Statistical Methods

- 28 October: Secondary Data Analysis

- 11-12 November: SPSS for Windows I

- 9-10 November: STATA
Only a selection of courses is shown above. For details of fees and other courses, Tel: 01524 593064 statistics@lancaster.ac.uk
www.cas.lancs.ac.uk/short_courses

dates for your diary

CASS Courses

- **14, 15 and 20, 21, 22 October 2004 (five-day course): Quantitative Survey Design and Implementation**

Venue: Royal Statistical Society, London

Because of ESRC support, a number of bursaries are available which reduce the fee payable - applicants must be full-time students, UK academic staff or ESRC-funded researchers.

Details: Jane Schofield, Department of Social Statistics, University of Southampton, Tel: 023 8059 5376 cass@socsci.soton.ac.uk
www.socstats.soton.ac.uk/cass

The Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research

- **13 September: Surveys and Sampling**

- **15 September: Introduction to Data Analysis Part 2**

- **4 October: Questionnaire Design**

- **1-2 November: Introduction to Demographic Concepts & Methods**

- **5 November: Multilevel Modelling**

- **15 November: Introduction to Population Estimating & Forecasting**

- **22 November: Introduction to Stata**

- **29-30 November: Demographic Forecasting with POPGROUP**

- **3 December: Sampling Theory**

Through funding awarded as part of the ESRC Research Methods Programme, some bursaries available for short courses, to cover course fees and a contribution to travel and subsistence.

Details: Margaret Martin, Tel: 0161 275 4589 ccsr@man.ac.uk
www.ccsr.ac.uk/courses/external/ 2004-2005

Surrey University Day Courses in Social Research

- **29 September: Introduction to Focus Groups**

- **6 October: Research Management**

- **13 October: Introduction to Qualitative Interviewing**

- **20 October: Introduction to Qualitative Data Analysis**

- **10 November: Research Reviewing**

- **16 November: Writing Successful Research Proposals**

- **23 November: Communicating Research Practice: skills and techniques**

- **8 December: Managing Data with SPSS for Windows**

Details: 01483 689458 day.courses@soc.surrey.ac.uk
www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/daycourses

CONFERENCES

- **12 November: Assess: SPSS Users' Group Annual Meeting**

Venue: RSS, London

Details: peter.watson@mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk

- **14 December: Society for Research in Education, Postgraduate Student Conference**

Conference provides a context for new researchers to give and receive feedback on ongoing research in higher education and to network with others in the field.

Venue: University of Bristol

Details: **www.srhe.ac.uk**

Are you running a course, seminar or conference?

If you are involved in (or know of) a training course, seminar or conference that other SRA members could attend, please contact the SRA admin office.

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SRA NEWS – next issue

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