

MARCH:2024



research matters



A new era for evaluation: the power of data linking

By Faye Gracey, senior principal research officer, Welsh Government

I first started designing evaluations of government policy and programmes around 20 years ago. Most were mixed methods, and often involved analysing administrative data, including information about people accessing public services. But back then we didn't have the infrastructure, governance arrangements or secure processes to be able to securely link these records to other administrative datasets. I'm really pleased to say we do now.



My team is part of [Administrative Data Research \(ADR\) UK](#) – a partnership transforming the way researchers access the UK's wealth of public sector data to enable better informed policy decisions that improve lives.

By administrative data, we mean the information that is created when we interact with public services, like hospital records, or school attainment data or car tax. We want to make more and more of this individual-level data available for secure research and evaluation.

We've been able to demonstrate the power of administrative data and data linkage, and how they can be used to complement other research methods and to inform evaluation.

Here is just one example: Care & Repair Cymru is a Welsh charity helping older people to live independently through repairs, adaptations and home maintenance. I first evaluated its activities in 2007 as a research contractor. But, at that time, it wasn't possible to link multiple data sources to provide a picture of longer-term outcomes.

Now, thanks to the [Secure Anonymised Information Linkage \(SAIL\) databank](#), approved researchers can apply to access a vast number of public sector datasets for research with a public benefit. Care & Repair Cymru service records are now deposited in the SAIL databank. This allowed our team¹ to undertake a matched control evaluation using linked longitudinal data of people aged 60 to 95. Analysts assessed the risk of care home admissions for nearly 100,000 service users with different frailty levels, against a matched control group of the same number who had not received any support or advice from Care & Repair Cymru. This showed that the Care & Repair interventions helped to prevent care home admissions for moderately and severely frail individuals.

The [evidence provided by this linked data study](#) was compelling. Within a context of huge budgetary pressures, it helped inform the Welsh Government's decision to increase funding² to Care & Repair agencies in Wales, ensuring public funds are used effectively and efficiently. Care & Repair agencies across Wales are now able to help more older people to maintain their independence. And because of this

analysis, the Welsh Government is also encouraging Regional Partnership Boards to invest in housing adaptations as a preventative intervention through the Housing with Care Fund.

Across the UK there are several Trusted Research Environments (TREs) where data owners can make administrative and survey data available securely for research purposes, including evaluations. As well as SAIL, other examples include the [ONS Secure Research Service](#) and Public Health Scotland's electronic [Data Research and Innovation Service \(eDris\)](#).

Key to the success of these secure research environments is having an accredited system to de-identify the data. In Wales, we have a [privacy by design](#) accredited system, supported by Digital Health and Care Wales to anonymise, encrypt and recombine datasets.

All Welsh Government Social Research (GSR) evaluability assessments now consider data linking as a matter of course. We're also keen to encourage other researchers to make greater use of administrative data. To help with this, ADR UK has recently created a meta data catalogue which makes it easier to scope what datasets are available.

I'd argue that the power of data linking, and the progress made by ADR UK, ONS, SAIL and others, mean that we are already in a new era for evaluation. But we need your help to continue to expand the datasets that are available. If you're creating a new data collection, please do ensure an appropriate privacy notice is in place, making clear that data may be linked for research purposes. This will allow your exciting new datasets to be added to our TREs and will help unlock the power of linked data research.

¹ Joe Hollinghurst, Richard Fry, Ashley Akbari, Alan Watkins, Neil Williams, Sarah Hillcoat-Nallétamby, Ronan A Lyons, Andrew Clegg, Sarah E Rodgers.

² Capital funding has increased from £1.6M to £3M in the last two years, and revenue funding has increased from £4.3M to £5M.

What do you think of Research Matters?

Research Matters is for anyone interested in social research, whether working as a social researcher, using social research or just wanting to learn more about it.

The editorial team is keen to hear from readers what you think about the magazine. Are there any industry sectors, methods, or disciplines you would like to see included more often? Or other features or series you would like to suggest? Or would you like to write a regular column on an industry hot topic? Please email admin@the-sra.org.uk with any ideas. You do not necessarily need to contribute to any future features but are more than welcome to do so if you would like!



Message from our new chair

Ed Dunn, discusses his intentions and priorities as the new chair of the SRA.

It's a genuine pleasure to be writing my first editorial and I'm thrilled to have been appointed to be the new chair of the board of trustees. The SRA has been a constant throughout my career. As an early career researcher, my first training course was an SRA one, and a subsequent trip to the SRA annual conference opened my eyes to the wider community that existed. Later, again SRA training helped further develop the qualitative skills I needed to complete an MSc, while more recently I was invited to deliver a keynote talk at the annual Cathie Marsh Lecture. The progression of my involvement with the SRA well reflects my career and I am sure that is no coincidence. I look forward to giving something back.



My immediate priorities over the coming year are to work with the staff and board to successfully appoint a new chief executive, given Graham's retirement; to finalise and share a new strategy; improve our governance; and ensure we continue to deliver the rich and varied professional development opportunities and guidance our members enjoy. Having chaired my first board meeting in January, and having had several discussions with my predecessors and the staff team, it is both clear and reassuring to me that we are all aligned to those priorities and committed to the success of the SRA. In that endeavour, I would like to

pay tribute to the efforts and success of my predecessors, Ailbhe McNabola and Diarmid Campbell-Jack, for their chairing and commitment to the role at a challenging time. Ailbhe provides her own reflections a little later in this edition.

So, turning to this edition of Research Matters, as always, thanks to the contribution of our membership and the work of our publication team we are not short of interesting and informative articles. In addition to Ailbhe's reflections, Faye Gracey, from Welsh

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Government provides a compelling story of how evaluation studies utilising the power of linked data sources have added extra insight to pressured funding decisions within the Care and Repair sector in Wales. Faye highlights how the trusted research environments available within the UK are ushering in a new era of complementary research methods adding value to the end result. Career pathways and the continued professional development of social researchers is an area I am passionate about, and it remains at the heart of the SRA's mission. The performance, opportunity, progression (POP) framework at IFF Research

is another welcome addition to the formal structures that exist within our community to support the development and performance of individuals. Thank you to Gill Stewart, Mohsin Uppal and Nicola Wildash for sharing this with us. Participatory research methods received a shot in the arm recently with the coverage of Labour's intention to make use of citizen assemblies if it is elected in the forthcoming general election. Kate Hughes of the Trussell Trust and Maria Portugal from Citizens Advice give us an overview of their use of lived experience research to support their collaborative approach to helping people in financial hardship. We often talk so much about influencing and evaluating policy, but this is a really interesting example of service improvement. It is not just our own chief executive who is retiring this year. In May, Guy Goodwin, chief executive at NatCen Social Research, will retire after 35 years' service for the good of social research and social statistics. We are pleased that Guy has shared some reflections and highlights of his career in this edition as well as his tips for a successful career in our sector. We wish you well in your retirement, Guy. Finally, Rosie Abbott from ICON plc and Eileen Irvin at Ipsos share their experiences of and guidance for making the most of biodata in remote research studies.

All in all, it's a packed and wonderfully varied edition! I hope you enjoy it and I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible at the annual conference in June.

Thank You

Message from our outgoing co-chair

By Ailbhe McNabola, outgoing SRA co-chair

New horizons for the SRA

I write this having recently handed over the baton of chairing the SRA, which I have shared with Diarmid Campbell-Jack since spring 2021, to our new chair Ed Dunn. I have been reflecting on what has been an eventful and largely successful three



years for the organisation, and in my conversations with Ed (the ones where he gets to ask where all the skeletons are hidden) the focus has been on how much potential there is for the SRA to develop further. And no, there aren't any skeletons in the cupboard, just old drafts of ethics guidance...

The SRA exists to promote excellence in social research. Social research is crucially important for understanding

society, for thinking about knotty problems and how we might tackle them, and for providing policymakers with the kinds of insights they can use to make a difference in whatever field they are focusing on. If social research really matters, then excellent social research is what we must all aim for. Here are my 'greatest hits' from the last few years, during which time it's been an honour and a pleasure to co-chair the organisation.

Dealing with the challenges of Covid-19

Despite the challenges of Covid-19, the team kept things going and even expanded our business. In 2020 the SRA team had worked hard to move our training offer online, and since spring 2021 that has been going really well, with our training income increasing and also a better offer for members or other participants. Online courses broaden access, and we've seen strong bookings on our online courses. We've also added some new courses reflecting developments in social research methods, and have been bringing back some of the face-to-face training as many people also value that approach. Overall, the mix is working well. We also successfully moved to hybrid/home-based working for our staff team.

Providing leadership in the development of the profession

Mid-2021 we published a ground-breaking research report on diversity and inclusion in the social research profession, produced for us by the Young Foundation and involving over 950 researchers in the study. We are proud of this work which provides an essential baseline for any conversations about diversity and inclusion in social research, and a starting point from which to measure change. Diversity and inclusion remain as key strategic priorities for the SRA board, and we are investing in activities and initiatives to keep this debate alive.

Doing what we do best – getting social researchers together

We experimented with moving our annual conference to a summer date, and ran a successful online version in 2021 before returning with a sold-out summer conference in 2023. Our members sat in the sun-soaked gardens of the Royal College of Physicians in London in between insightful sessions and much-missed mingling. A key part of the SRA offer has always been the networking and connection for our members, and it was fantastic to be able to return to providing that and seeing old and new faces.

LOOKING AHEAD

As I sign off as outgoing co-chair, a final thank you to the SRA board and the staff team, not least long-standing CEO Graham Farrant, who will retire later this year. There will be a proper send-off for Graham this summer and

an opportunity to thank him in person in June at the helm at his last SRA annual conference (next year he can just turn up looking relaxed). You can find more information about the conference on our website. I look forward to

welcoming a new CEO and to working with the board and entire staff team to continue to improve what we do for members and social researchers.



Empowering social researchers: a framework for success

By Gill Stewart, learning and development director, Mohsin Uppal, research executive and Nicola Wildash, associate director, IFF Research

IFF Research has grown in recent years, and as the roles and responsibilities in the expanded teams became more defined, the need for a career framework grew. Gill Stewart, learning and development director, worked with the team to create a robust guide to roles and responsibilities at IFF. This led to the POP (performance, opportunity, progression) framework. In this article, IFF social researchers share how the framework will help them and Gill describes lessons learned from developing such a framework.

Research executive, Mohsin Uppal, on how the POP framework provides clarity for someone new to their social research career

At first, the idea of knowing what level I should be working at was quite daunting. During school, it was very easy to see what grade I was getting and using this to know my level. But since starting the world of work, this is something I've lacked. I joined IFF Research as a graduate, on IFF's trainee research executive (TRE) scheme. We all had differing levels of experience. So, knowing exactly what level I should be working at was something I wondered about.

Now, thanks to the framework, I am much clearer about the type of performance I should be working towards, and IFF's expectations of 'great'. The framework breaks down technical and behavioural skills at each

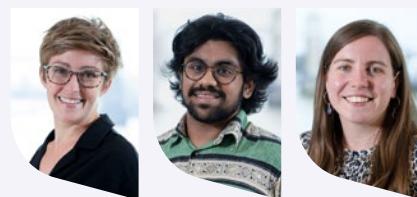
level within the social research domain, using examples that are relevant to me and that cover all the aspects of the research process. The research team at IFF had a significant impact on developing the framework, so I know it aligns with the experiences of my colleagues.

The framework also provides examples of what I need to be doing if I wish to work at a more senior level, and what I should be doing in my day-to-day role when looking for a promotion. In this way, I can use it as a roadmap for professional development, as I know what exactly I need to aim for. This is something I really appreciate as I consider how I can develop my career in social research and at IFF.

Associate director, Nicola Wildash, on how POP will help her be a better leader and prepare for promotion

I think the framework is going to make it much easier for everyone to understand what is expected of them and ensure we are investing time developing skills that matter to IFF. I think the level of detail is perfect – not too prescriptive but detailed enough so we can all understand what 'good' looks like at each level. Personally, it will help me in the following ways:

- ▶ Providing inspiration on how to best work with my teams: I like the inclusion of 'behavioural' skills. Especially at senior level, the way I do my job is just as important



as what I can deliver day to day. I want to lead teams that feel supported and empowered, as well as helping improve how we do things. The 'working with others' and 'leadership' skills provide easy to understand examples and ideas of how I can be doing this at my level.

- ▶ Identifying areas for development within my current role and supporting my path to director level: the design of the POP framework makes it easy to understand what areas I need to spend more time developing to prepare for the director role. The simple structure, with each role building on the former, makes it easy to visualise what differentiates the roles. It's also boosted my confidence, highlighting the skills I'm stronger in.
- ▶ Empowering me to support my junior colleagues: occasionally, we need to have difficult conversations with colleagues when our expectations are not being consistently met. The POP framework is a practical tool to help structure these conversations and ensure that individuals are clear about what they need to improve.

As part of POP's development, Gill worked with staff at all levels and actively encouraged feedback on how it could be improved. She shares five tips for anyone creating something similar.

Start with the end

It's natural to want to get stuck straight in and get ideas down on paper about what 'good' means. But it's important to answer the seemingly obvious (but actually quite hard) questions first: What specifically are we trying to achieve with this? How will we know if it's worked?

Include everyone

The framework was designed to be used by everyone, all the time, not just the people team or at appraisal time. So, we tested it at various stages of its design with staff from all levels of the business and from different teams, actively encouraging criticism and problem-spotting.

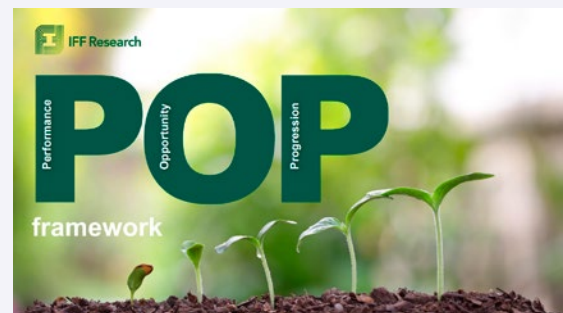
Allow for differences

Different approaches and personalities are important, and we wanted to acknowledge that 'good' doesn't always look the same. So, we used

language that described the end point we wanted to see but allowed space for differences in getting there. For instance, we talked about delivering presentations in a way that showed awareness of a client's needs, and a knowledge of and enthusiasm for the research, rather than specifying what someone should look or sound like when they are doing that.

Balancing lightness and detail

To be useful, our framework needed to be easy to read and to absorb, but provide the detail needed for discussing performance or development. We spent time combing through our skills descriptions to trim them wherever possible. Our final output was a little more detailed than we had at first envisaged. But, on balance, we think it's a good fit for our audience of social researchers. And we will continue to refine it as we use it.



Make it POP!

It's such an important document that it was worth making it a little fun. We wanted people to pick it up. So, we called upon our designer to make it visually 'zing' a little. And after mulling over names that included lots of words like 'capability', 'competency' and 'skills', we were delighted when our marketing team came up with POP. No one's forgotten the name yet!

More information: www.iffresearch.com

CONFERENCE 2024

SRA annual conference 2024

#SRACONF24

Save the date: Thursday 6 June • Royal College of Physicians, London NW1

Registration opening soon, including early bird rates!

The SRA annual conference is the only forum in the UK for bringing together social researchers from all sectors and disciplines to share knowledge and ideas, to debate our most pressing professional issues, and, of course, to meet and talk. Our 2023 conference was a sell-out with over 300 attending, and we look forward to an equally successful event this year. The event is followed by a garden drinks reception.

With thanks to:



Our in-person one-day event will feature:

- ▶ four keynote speakers including Christina Silver, CAQDAS Networking Project, in conversation with Steven Wright, University of Central Lancashire, on the challenges of, and developments in, AI; other speakers to be announced
- ▶ 16 presentations from peer researchers sharing their recent research findings
- ▶ masterclasses and networking opportunities including a special session led by Social Researchers of Colour (SROC)

Social research: a good career choice?

Is social research a good career choice? This is what we asked Guy Goodwin, CEO at the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), who recently announced he would retire in May 2024 after over 35 years working in social research and statistics.

What would you say to someone thinking of a career in social research?

Go for it! It's given me such pleasure working in different subject areas, methods and organisations with colleagues who care about society and people's lives. It's intellectually stimulating and fun. Although if you want to be a multi-millionaire, perhaps try the City!



What is the highlight of your social research career?

There are so many. It's been a privilege to lead NatCen as its fifth CEO. I loved working in education on teacher shortages; in Ofsted when it took on new post-16 and early years' remits; on the secretariat setting up the School Teachers' Review Body. It was great to lead the commissioning of complex social surveys at ONS, particularly the International Passenger Survey, and exploring the first national UK Time Use Survey. The list could go on.

What will be your biggest regret?

I wrote the GSS Commissioning Guidelines for Social Surveys during the John Major, 'market testing' years. The model largely persists in departments and UKRI. It was fit for purpose back then but it's so costly nowadays and should be overhauled. I would have enjoyed doing that but it wasn't to be.

What piece of advice would you give your younger self?

Stop sending emails and pick up the phone.

Where would you like to see NatCen in ten years' time?

NatCen is a fantastic organisation, a national institution. It's well positioned for the future. I would love to see it properly backed by government or UKRI, in the same way as, say, the IFS is through its centres. The dream for NatCen is to do more of its own research and dissemination, unconstrained by government commissions. So success would be seeing NatCen doing more of that and still thriving in 2034.

What principles should social research make sure that it grabs hold of as it plots a path into a future?

To be honest, I don't think we need more principles. It's not a lack of principles that makes us less relevant and influential than we should be and, say, economists are. Please be bold, tell people about your evidence and why it's important!

What was the most enjoyable period in your career and why?

It was a period after I relocated from London and worked at ONS in Titchfield, a 20-minute or so drive from home. I was happy in most aspects of my life with my daughter in childhood.

At work, I was leading the ONS Centre for Demography from 2006. The job was fantastic. I had great colleagues. We did a lot of methodological and exploratory work on using administrative data in population, migration statistics and the census. That was a very enjoyable period.

What's the funniest thing (big or small) in your career?

I overslept when due to brief a Tory minister. I rushed to shower, put my suit on, stuffed my money and white handkerchiefs in my trousers, ran to the tube and got to the department breathless. In those days, briefings were grave affairs of mainly senior, dark-suited men round a large table with the minister directly opposite you. I was doing fine until I sneezed, pulled out my handkerchief, blew my nose, and was surprised everyone was looking at me aghast. I turned my eyes downwards to see a pair of my girlfriend's underwear. I laughed a lot at that, especially when I was ticked off for inappropriate behaviour in front of the minister!

And what's next?

I'm excited about the next chapter. We're going to do some of the things we haven't had time for ... travelling, seeing family more, going to the theatre and walking. I'll be reading some of the thousands of books my parents left me. I'm also doing bits and pieces locally and in areas of personal interest, such as recently joining the board at the Youth Futures Foundation.

Lived experience panels in action

By Kate Hughes, financial inclusion (helpline services) development manager, The Trussell Trust and Maria Portugal, service design lead, Citizens Advice



Background

The free [Help through Hardship helpline](#) is delivered by Citizens Advice and the Trussell Trust. It offers personalised, holistic support to people who do not have enough money for essentials. Our helpline advisers talk with people about the reasons why they do not have enough money, help them access all the benefits they're eligible for and connect them with a wider range of services and support. Advisers can make a referral to a food bank in the Trussell Trust network for emergency food or to Mind's Infoline for mental health information if needed. The helpline operates in England and Wales.

Project purpose

Citizens Advice and the Trussell Trust are committed to helping people who are experiencing financial hardship. Equally, we recognise the importance of involving people with lived experience to shape our work and improve our service.

To support these ambitions, we established a panel of Help through Hardship helpline advisers with previous lived experience of financial hardship. Our goal was to create a space where advisers could openly share their personal experiences as well as their professional experience supporting people on the helpline. This dual perspective aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges people face and to consider innovative solutions to enable development of the helpline.

Lived experience panels represent one of many participatory approaches. Collaboration with people with experience of financial hardship in

decision-making, providing direction and influencing developments enables the changes we make to have the most significant impact.

The panel

The initiative began in 2022. We planned to work with individuals with lived experience who were also staff. So, careful consideration of their needs, working arrangements, confidentiality and support, including safeguarding processes, was crucial.

As this was a unique and innovative initiative, it required regular cross-partnership engagement, including consulting individuals from leadership, operations and communications. A helpline adviser with lived experience was able to join the project initiation group to provide invaluable insights including advising us on the right language and communication channels for advisers with lived experience.

We held ten 90-minute workshops in 2023. All the time that advisers gave to the panel was within their working hours on the helpline, including preparation and reflection time. Sessions were facilitated by colleagues from both organisations with a core group of facilitators across the sessions being vital to ensuring strong relationships were built. A workshop discussion with the panel on accessing and engaging with debt advice enabled conversations with the Citizens Advice money and debt programme on referrals. Insights about people taking action after advice were incorporated into scoping sessions.

Sharon Barron reflected about their time as a panel member: 'Being part of the panel was very valuable and meaningful. I was able to reflect

on my own experience and those of other members. We used these to really focus on the barriers and challenges some of our clients can face when accessing advice. I was able to work collaboratively to look at how the service can address some of these barriers, understand our clients better and, hopefully, improve client experience when using our service'.

What we learned

Through working with the panel, we gained knowledge that we can apply to further participation work within our partnerships:

- ▶ Getting early cross-organisational buy-in for the project ensured that insights from the panel could be acted upon.
- ▶ A high level of time, care and resource was needed to effectively facilitate the panel.
- ▶ An effective feedback loop was important – each session included updates on changes made to the service as a direct result of insights from the panel and check-in activities.
- ▶ Sharing expertise was essential as was determining responsibility for specific processes – we were able to embed Trussell Trust's participation principles in the work, while safeguarding of panel members followed Citizens Advice processes.

We plan to build on the brilliant work of the panel through extended workshops. These will be run on an ad-hoc basis to ensure we gather essential insights at the points when these can make the biggest impact.

Making the most of biodata in remote studies

By Rosie Abbott, associate director, ICON plc
and Eileen Irvin, associate director, Ipsos.



Advances in technology in the last few years have opened up new frontiers in the possibilities of what biodata can be collected from social research respondents. These cover a broad spectrum of possibilities, from wearable fitness trackers, that allow real-time measures of heart rate, to lateral flow tests that allow participants to do in-home diagnostic tests. All of these open up opportunities to collect new information about participants, as part of social research studies. For example, studies like [REACT](#) (real-time assessment of community transmission), which measured the rate of Covid-19 infection and immunity in the population, would not have been possible at that speed and scale without these technological advances.

Biodata has formed a part of social research for many years. This has included biomedical samples to test for specific health conditions, using biosensors to monitor and understand the body's physical reactions, and physical measures of the body to monitor fitness levels. For example, biomeasures, such as saliva and blood samples have been collected on the [Health Survey for England](#) since 1991, to look at the prevalence of public health concerns like obesity, nicotine exposure and high blood pressure in an objective way. Biodata has also allowed longitudinal studies to monitor long-term drivers of health outcomes. For instance, the [1958 National Child Development Study](#), [1970 British Cohort Study](#), and [Millennium Cohort Study](#) all collect genetic and epigenetic data, allowing for analysis of the link between DNA and outcomes.

The ability to collect these data remotely, without requiring a face-to-face specialist or a lab setting, opens up opportunities to maximise the usefulness of this type of data. The ability to collect these data in people's own homes allows collection from participants unable or unwilling to have an interviewer in their home, and reduces the need to cluster participants around specific locations. It also allows for monitoring of more 'real' data, by avoiding the lab setting and following people as they live their lives. Larger sample sizes and more types of data collection are also possible as remote biodata are often more cost effective per participant, meaning more data, and more granular data, can be collected.

However, there are some important things that you need to think about if you are planning to collect biodata remotely from respondents:

- ▶ **Non-response bias:** Practical barriers to participation such as access to the internet, access to a post box and computer literacy, plus lower response and consent rates, increase the risk of higher non-response bias. This can also affect compliance, such how much time people spend wearing a fitness tracker. It's therefore important to think about what can be done to ensure your results are as representative as possible of the population you are measuring.
- ▶ **Privacy, legal and GDPR considerations:** When you are collecting continuous data with insight into minute-to-minute information on people's lives, it's vital these data are used appropriately and kept securely, and participants truly understand what they are consenting to.

▶ Statistical and analytical considerations:

Digital devices and real-time monitoring can generate thousands of data points per minute. Analysis also needs to account for missing data, which, as it depends on when people choose to collect the data, cannot be treated as 'missing at random'. This requires innovative approaches to statistical analysis, requiring sophisticated models and algorithms.

- ▶ **Data quality:** There are many aspects to remote data collection that have the potential to affect data quality. New technologies and measures that have been validated for face-to-face interviews need to be validated for use remotely, to ensure they produce high quality, comparable data, minimise the risk of variability between participants, and that data limitations are understood. It is also not possible to provide training for participants in the way an interviewer, clinician or lab technician can receive specialist training and experience. Therefore, instructions need to be considered carefully, to ensure they as easy as possible for participants to use, and to support people to collect the data accurately.

Overall, the rapid integration of digital technology is revolutionising the way we undertake research. As researchers, this opens up many new opportunities and challenges, including for biodata collection.

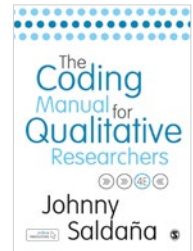
NOTE: The authors will be presenting on the challenges and opportunities of remote biodata collection in their session on 'Advancements in Digital Health Technology' at the Royal Statistical Society Conference in Brighton: 2-6 September.

The coding manual for qualitative researchers (4th edition)

Johnny Saldaña

SAGE, 2021

Reviewed by Joanna Booth, freelance social researcher



Johnny Saldaña from Arizona State University, world-renowned expert in qualitative methods, provides an indispensable guide for those navigating qualitative data analysis. The book introduces the philosophy of coding before leading into the practicality of the practice of it, making it invaluable for novices and experts alike.

Saldaña starts by elucidating the essence of coding and its pivotal role in qualitative research. He emphasises the researcher's intimate engagement with data, setting the tone for the in-depth exploration of coding techniques that follows. From foundational methods like

open coding to advanced strategies such as axial coding, Saldaña provides a lucid description, complete with applications and potential challenges.

A standout feature is the book's iterative approach to coding. Saldaña underscores revisiting data, refining codes and being open to evolving interpretations. He then ventures into post-coding processes, illustrating the journey from codes to coherent narratives or theories. Recognising modern research's technological bent, a section on qualitative coding software offers unbiased insights, helping researchers select appropriate tools.

Notably, Saldaña doesn't sidestep the ethical dimension of coding, emphasising integrity and respect for participants.

This is more than a how-to guide; it's an immersion into the nuances of qualitative coding. Its accessible style, interspersed with relatable examples, ensures that the content resonates across disciplines. This is a must-have for the bookshelf for anyone in qualitative research. The great benefit is how the book demystifies the coding process, making it approachable and less intimidating.

Social research: issues, methods and process (5th edition)

Tim May and Beth Perry

MCGRAW HILL, 2022

Reviewed by Muntasir Sattar, freelance researcher



This is an accessible and useful overview of how researchers think, and generate knowledge about, our world.

The book begins with a focus on methodology, exploring the key ideas, assumptions and debates about how we know what we know. The next chapters explore values, ethics and the context of knowledge production. The authors then devote chapters to specific approaches and research methods with explanation and examples. The authors discuss quantitative and qualitative methods, their strengths and weaknesses, and include a discussion of case studies and digital methods.

The book feels current: it addresses the dilemmas and adjustments researchers have faced and made during the pandemic. The book is up to date with many recent references, as well as references to classic texts.

Chapters are generally organised into three parts. The authors typically begin with a description of the method, and then highlight some issues 'which shape and limit how we know the world'. The authors end each chapter with some references for further research, discussion questions and a task to help think about the material.

One strength of the book is the importance of becoming a reflexive researcher for thinking about the

influences that shape our research, the assumptions we make and the limits of what we produce. Another, is critical discussion of questions and issues that emerge when selecting approaches or methods. The authors also provide a useful review of contemporary debates about decolonising research, and intersectionality, and their relevance to researchers today.

Thus, the book serves experienced researchers particularly well with a recap of key ideas as well as introductions to newer frameworks. It is a substantial resource that will be useful for both professionals and students to bolster their methodological toolkits.

Essential skills for early career researchers

Joseph Roche

SAGE, 2022

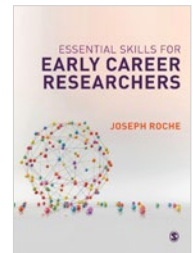
Reviewed by Cate Correia Hopkins, Building Digital UK

It is probably no secret that the career path of a researcher has undergone a tremendous shift in recent years. Academia, in particular, is changing as it responds to new challenges and expectations, while research careers are now available in a wide range of professional settings outside university. Any book claiming to be a guide for early career researchers (ECRs) needs to be able to address these new and emerging challenges in order to be useful. This guidebook is refreshingly honest and while it is directed at academic researchers, it contains useful advice to researchers in any number of settings.

The book covers all the key topic areas needed to build a successful career in research. What makes it particularly helpful is that it does not ignore the specific challenges that ECRs are facing. Professional skills such as research methods, writing skills and teaching are tackled, pairing clear advice with vignettes that help highlight the points being made. However, it is in its guidance for navigating aspects of a research career that may be less familiar to ECRs that this book is particularly useful. Areas such as publishing and grant applications are where research careers stumble or take off and Roche approaches them frankly and

directly. His forthright approach may not be for everyone and might even be discouraging for some, but failing to look academia's shortcomings squarely in the eye is perhaps worse.

Whether you are a researcher in an academic, government or third sector role, this book gives a clear, accessible overview of the many and multifaceted skills you may be expected to develop. It is full of helpful tips to improve your practice and to navigate some of the trickier areas of a research career.



Titles for review



We are always looking for reviewers (SRA members only) to write a short review for us. All books up for review are listed below. If you are interested, please email admin@the-sra.org.uk and we'll send you guidelines. Please note that publications are available as eBooks only. Book reviews need to be submitted within 10 weeks of you receiving the book. Here are a few of the titles on offer:

The craft of qualitative longitudinal research

Bren Neale

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021

Doing qualitative research online – second edition

Janet E Salmons

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

Doing visual ethnography – fourth edition

Sarah Pink

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021

Ethics, integrity, and policymaking: the value of the case study, Research Ethics Forum Series: Volume 9

(ed. with Dónal O'Mathúna, Ron Iphofen)
Springer, 2022

Ethical evidence and policymaking: interdisciplinary and international research

(ed. with Dónal O'Mathúna and Ron Iphofen)
Policy Press, 2022

SRA training

Unless otherwise stated, all courses are run online using Zoom. In-person courses are held in London or Edinburgh. Online courses run over one day or two half days, and extended courses over two full days or three part-days.

New dates and courses are being added all the time (and only courses with space are shown below), so for latest info please visit www.the-sra.org.uk/training

Costs: **online**: SRA members: half day: £82.50; one day or two part-days: £165; two days or three part-days: £330. Non-members: half day: £110; one day or two part-days: £220; two days or three part-days: £440; **in person**: SRA members: £202.50; non-members: £270.

If you have any queries, please contact Lindsay: lindsay.adams@the-sra.org.uk

Full details of all courses are at www.the-sra.org.uk/training

Evaluation

15 April: Impact evaluation (advanced), with Professor David Parsons

23 April: Research and evaluation project management, with Sally Culpitt

15 & 16 May (2 mornings): Theory-based evaluation: options and choices, with Professor David Parsons

17 May: Foundations of evaluation, with Professor David Parsons

3 & 4 June (2 mornings): Building and using a theory of change, with Professor David Parsons

4 June: Research and evaluation project management, with Sally Culpitt

Qualitative

20 March (in person, in London): Qualitative interviewing, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

16 April: Qualitative data analysis, with Dr Karen Lumsden

18 April: Introduction to qualitative research, with NatCen Learning

18 April: Writing up qualitative data, with Dr Karen Lumsden

25 & 26 April (2 afternoons): Creative methods in qualitative data collection, with Dr Nicole Brown

7 May: Introduction to qualitative data analysis, with NatCen Learning

9 May: Introduction to focus groups, with Dr Karen Lumsden

16 May: Narratives and storytelling in qualitative research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

17 May: Narrative analysis, with Dr Karen Lumsden

24 May: Introduction to qualitative interviewing, with Dr Karen Lumsden

31 May: Foundations of qualitative research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

5 June: Introduction to ethnographic methods, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

6 June: Reporting qualitative data, with NatCen Learning

12 June: Conducting online focus groups, with Dr Karen Lumsden

13 June: Digital qualitative interviewing, with Dr Karen Lumsden

13 & 14 June (2 afternoons): Creative data analysis, with Dr Nicole Brown

17 June: AI-assisted qualitative data analysis, with Christina Silver

27 & 28 June (2 afternoons): Positionality and reflexivity in qualitative research, with Dr Nicole Brown

Quantitative

26-28 March: Cognitive interviewing for testing survey questions, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

19 April: Introduction to sampling for social surveys; with Alexandru Cernat

1 May: Questionnaire design, with NatCen Learning

7 & 8 May (2 mornings): 21 ways to test your survey questions, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

20 May: Understanding statistical concepts and essential tests, with Dr Valerija Kolbas

22 May: Cognitive interviewing, with NatCen Learning

14 June: Data management and visualisation with R, with Dr Alexandru Cernat

18 to 20 June (3 afternoons): Correlation, linear and logistic regression with R, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

9 July: Imputation for item missing data, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

10 & 11 July (2 afternoons): The 3 stages of weighting probability surveys, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

Other research skills

17 April: Introduction to participatory action research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

26 April (in person, in London): Research with children and young people, with Berni Graham

30 April: Data visualisation and infographic design, with Nigel Hawtin

10 May: AI-assisted qualitative data analysis, with Dr Christina Silver

22 & 23 May (2 mornings): Research with children and young people, with Berni Graham

7 June: Consultancy skills for social researchers, with Professor Simon Haslam

25 June (in person, in London): Graphic design know-how for social researchers, with Lulu Pinney

1 July: Writing effective research reports, with Professor Simon Haslam

Spotlight on SRA activity

Training

www.the-sra.org.uk/training

Many qual, quant and evaluation courses are online.

Events

www.the-sra.org.uk/events

Blog

www.the-sra.org.uk/blog

Topical posts on researching.

Journal

www.the-sra.org.uk/journal

Read back issues and find out how to write an article for our free journal.

Resources

www.the-sra.org.uk/resources

Good practice guides and more.

Ethics

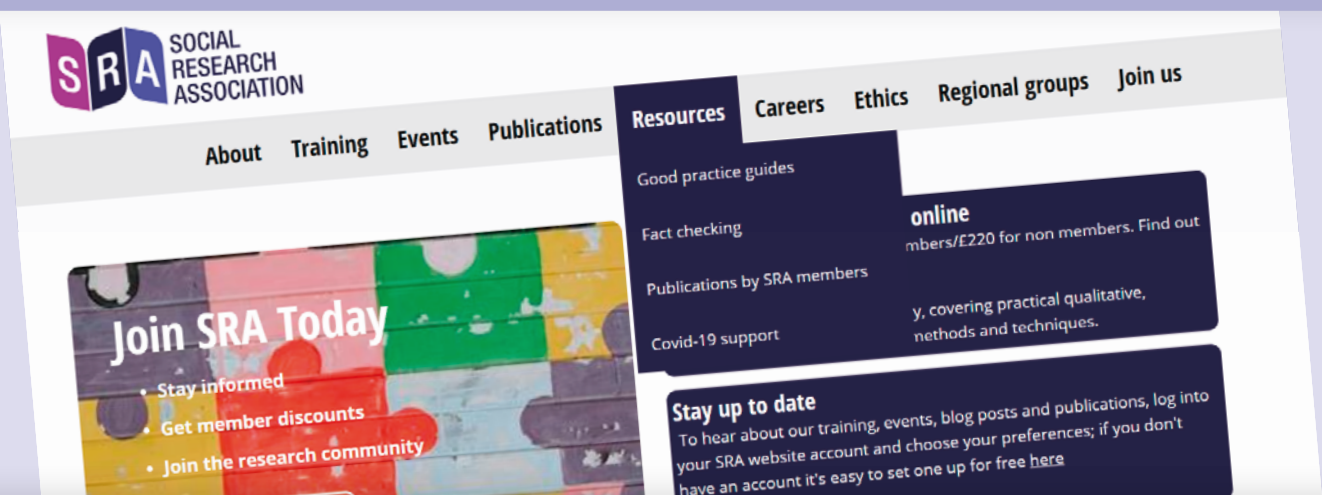
www.the-sra.org.uk/ethics

An expert forum for members' queries, good practice guides and more.

Member resources

Log in, go to www.the-sra.org.uk then see 'members' section.

Free access to 5,500+ social science journals, data science training at a third off, and more.



research matters

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