SRA SOCIAL
RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION

research matters

Embedding future wellbeing

By Joanne Corke, head of research for education, social justice and Welsh language group, Welsh Government

Wales has made a unique commitment to the wellbeing of future generations through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the 'WFG Act'). This far-reaching law requires engagement across and between a wide range of Welsh public bodies to work together to improve the environmental, economic, social and cultural wellbeing of Wales. It focuses on people and the planet now and for the future.

The overarching sustainable development principle means each body 'must act in a manner which seeks to ensure the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.[1]

The WFG Act provides us with seven wellbeing goals which aim to build a more equal, prosperous, healthy, resilient and globally responsible Wales with more cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and Welsh language. The vision behind the WFG Act is that across Wales we will have five ways of working which support the principle and goals. We will have acted for the long-term, worked better together, taken early action and engaged with people and communities.[2]

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[1] Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: the essentials [HTML] | GOV.WALES

Other information sources:
Welsh Government's Well-being of Future Generations continuous learning and improvement plan for 2023 to 2025 [HTML] | GOV.WALES

Future Trends: 2021 | GOV.WALES

National wellbeing indicators | GOV.WALES

The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales – Acting today for a better tomorrow

[2] ibid.

The role of research

As a government social research (GSR) profession, many of our values, approaches and instincts align with those of the WFG Act – taking account of the long-term, helping to prevent problems occurring or getting worse, taking an integrated and collaborative approach, and considering and involving different communities in the research process.

The WFG Act has no precedent and we are thinking about wellbeing differently. This poses opportunities but also challenges. We are evolving our practices to fully embed the sustainable development principle, goals and ways of working into how we plan and conduct research; either in-house or commissioned. In parallel, we continue to support and inform Welsh Government decision-making and delivery through promoting and providing research and evaluation which takes account of the WFG Act.

Our vision

We want to have a clear conceptual and practical understanding of GSR obligations under the WFG Act and how they can be implemented through the research process.

A GSR group was set up which worked with the Welsh Government research community and identified some key areas:

- improve the understanding and practical use of the WFG Act in GSR research, for example through tools and the development of case studies and exemplars
- clarify the role of the GSR profession to influence our policy and delivery colleagues' approaches
- formal incorporation of the WFG Act into our quality assurance framework (the practical guidelines which support researchers across Welsh Government)
- continued dialogue, discussion and debate about the use of the WFG Act within the GSR profession to support a deep embedding and continued evolution of our understanding

Latest activity

An online training module for researchers has been developed and is due to be piloted. This sets out some of the key considerations for researchers. The example shown poses key WFG Act considerations in designing research studies.

Working with the wider research community

As we further embed the sustainable development principle and ways of working into our research plans and commissions, we look forward to the ideas and creativity of the research community to explore the possibilities the WFG Act provides.

Designing

Upon **designing** our research project, we may consider...

How can this research project create **prosperous** opportunities?

How can project resources be used sustainably to protect economic and environmental **resilience**?

How can the project design ensure **equal** opportunities for access and participation?

Does this design maximize opportunities for **Welsh Language** engagement?

In person

SRA co-chair, Ailbhe McNabola, on the personal touch.

Welcome to this quarter's Research Matters.

It's been a busy few months at the SRA, as we've been working towards our first in-person annual conference since 2019, taking place in London on 15 June. More on that in the pages that follow – we know that people are really enjoying being back at in-person events and we're looking forward to a good day with great speakers.

Our training programmes continue to be popular and we are now looking to develop a new course on the subject of 'inclusive social research practice'. We're looking for experienced expert(s) to design and deliver a training course on this topic. Check out page 5 and get in touch if you're interested.

As ever, we're keen to share stories from researchers tackling a range of challenges and using a variety of methods. In this edition, we hear from Joanne Corke, about how the Future Generations Act is being embedded into GSR practice in Wales. Richard Silverwood writes about the opportunities presented by linking routine health data with cohort studies. Amy Proctor shares an update on newly available, digitised archive collections at London Metropolitan Archives, all of which cover the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and its aftermath. And a team from ONS describe their experience of testing how reliable and representative administrative data can be for statistical purposes.

Earlier this year I was delighted to chair our annual Cathie Marsh memorial lecture, which we hold each year jointly with the Royal Statistical Society. This year's contributions were excellent, all discussing how cost, speed and quality compete in survey research. Lucia Barbone reflects on what she heard and learned that evening. And one of the speakers, Ed Dunn, writes for us here about his views on the future of survey-based evidence.

For something a little different, I enjoyed reading Sunny Gunessee's contribution about running a podcast on sociology and the career opportunities it presents, aimed at GCSE students. He is looking for volunteers for the podcast, having interviewed two SRA trustees for previous episodes. If you think you can help to inspire future social researchers, Sunny's article tells you what to expect and how to get in touch.

Do check out the list of books for which we are looking for reviewers (page 14). There are some useful titles, and if you write a short review for us you get to keep the book!

I hope you enjoy this edition of Research Matters. Keep an eye out for the latest news on events and activities on our website, and visit **https://jobs. the-sra.org.uk/** where we share current career opportunities in social research.

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!

SRA annual conference 2023 #SRAConf23

After four long years, we're excited that the SRA conference is back. On June 15, the social research community will descend on the Royal College of Physicians to learn, share, debate, meet and chat. In 2019, we hosted over 300+ researchers and research users and we've no doubt 2023 will be the same hotbed of ideas and opportunities.

Plenary speakers

Catherine Hutchinson, head of the Joint HM Treasury and Cabinet Office evaluation taskforce: in conversation with SRA trustee, Martina Vojtkova, of the National Centre for Social Research.

Heidi Safia Mirza, emeritus professor of equality studies in education, UCL Institute of Education: 'Decolonising research: rethinking race, gender and intersectional approaches to research'.

Robert Cuffe, head of statistics for BBC News: 'Clearly communicating complexity – can it be done?'

Ralph Scott, research associate, British Election Study, University of Manchester, and WISERD postdoctoral fellow at Cardiff University: 'Does ChatGPT know what the most important issue is? Using large language models to code open-text social survey responses at scale'.

Breakout sessions

Learn from the real-world experience of your research peers:

◗ innovation for all

◗ how co-creation leads to solutions

◗ measure twice, estimate once

◗ masterclass: sensitive topics and vulnerable participants

◗ early career researchers

◗ making the most of peer researchers

◗ researchers in residence

◗ simplifying evaluation for complex problems

◗ inclusive research from the start

◗ masterclass: an infographic 101

Exhibition

In celebration of being back face-to-face once again, 'Please do touch' will feature tangible and touchable pieces, rooted in research but will cover the whole spectrum of the research process from design to outputs.

Delegate rates
£75 to £140 for SRA members
£195 for non-members

REGISTER
Register at www.the-sra.org.uk/SRAConference2023

SRA training commission: inclusive social research practice

As part of our continuing commitment to diversity and inclusion in social research, we are inviting experienced expert(s) to design and deliver a training course on the subject of 'inclusive social research practice'.

This training course will run on a regular basis (proportionate to demand) as part of the SRA's portfolio of courses aimed at those working within social research.

We pride ourselves on providing first-class training on social research topics. Our trainers are experts in their fields who have proven themselves to be dynamic and engaging trainers. Courses are supported by high-quality materials and seek to embed meaningful, long-term learning.

Course aims

The course aims are to encourage and enable those working in social research to include a diverse array of experiences of different groups in their research. This should be considered through design, sampling, data collection, analysis and reporting stages.

The course should be particularly mindful of under-represented groups who have:

◗ experiences which may be less likely to be included in research

◗ different requirements to other participants/audience

Format

SRA courses are typically hosted online via Zoom. The majority last one full working day. Numbers attending range from 12 to 16. This is our preferred format, though other formats may be considered if suitable for the course and if they help to achieved the desired outcomes.

The course will run regularly proportionate to demand.

The initial piece of commissioned work will include developing all course materials, presentations and supporting resources.

Who we would like to work with

We want to commission an experienced researcher (or someone working within a research capacity), with proven experience and expertise in the practice of inclusive research. You should have experience of designing and delivering training to a high standard **or** transferrable experience and aptitude for helping others to learn. The training should be engaging, inclusive and accessible.

We welcome interest from all sections of the research community, irrespective people's race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity and in particular those from under-represented groups.

Renumeration

The SRA will offer competitive rates for both the design and the delivery of the course. This will include a one-off fee for the initial course design and a recurring fee for each delivery of the course. We anticipate a variety of proposals offering varying outputs. Therefore remuneration for course **development** will be discussed as part of the selection process but can also be discussed by contacting Graham Farrant via admin@the-sra.org.uk.

The SRA works to a standard pay model for course **delivery**, which we are happy to disclose on request.

How to express interest

The SRA invites parties to signal their interest via our short expression of interest form by Friday 23 June. The form is at: bit.ly/SRA-EOI

A formal selection process will follow: anticipated to begin in early July.

We want to commission an experienced researcher (or someone working within a research capacity), with proven experience and expertise in the practice of inclusive research

From curriculum to careers: employability in sociology

By Sunny Gunessee, lead practitioner for teaching and learning, Jewish Community Secondary School (JCoSS)

Over the past few years, I have been developing a podcast called 'JCoSS presents… sound sociology'. The initial series was to support GCSE students during the pandemic in accessing bitesize episodes which covered the whole of the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) specification. Series one to six covers all topics that include research methods, basic theory, education, families, crime and stratification. Once I completed this series, I moved on to speaking with teachers about the cross-curricular nature of sociology with other subjects. The newest series started in September 2022. It is called 'In conversation with… careers', in which I interview sociologists in applied fields such as marketing, the law, the police, sport, medicine and government research. Two of our SRA trustees have featured: Naomi Day and Daniel Stunell.

Why bother?

I produced these careers-focused series so that students can hear how a sociology degree and A-level have helped employees to navigate the workplace, and for a more general audience interested in applied sociology. Helping young people gain not just sociological knowledge but also the skills of empathy, listening and seeing multiple perspectives makes sociologists vital to future employers. They can help address many pressing social issues which we are encountering, including the housing crisis, the development of technology and its uses, and the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. Episodes will be available every Monday during term time, on Anchor.fm and Spotify at: https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/jcoss-sociology/

Challenges with sociology in educational institutions

I am keen to emphasise the importance of sociology and its place in employability. Due to the challenges the subject is facing in secondary, further and higher education, sociology as a subject seems to be facing cuts. Educational institutes are being asked to keep subjects that have clear pathways for future employment. This leaves many educational institutions in a difficult position. School leaders often struggle to understand the future

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employment options that sociology can offer. The subject provides ample opportunities to enter a variety of sectors. All educational institutes must understand that the soft skills developed in a subject like sociology are vital for functioning teams and for developing great leaders of the future. Developing strong communication and interpersonal skills, analytical thinking, statistical application, cross-cultural understanding and leadership qualities are but a few. Sociology graduates are able to reflect on subject content and apply it contextually to the employment circumstances in which they find themselves.

Capacity and ambition to grow

My ambition is to take the findings from the podcast series and to support other educational institutes in secondary, further and higher education as well as other organisations that support graduates of sociology to find employment. I have been able to complement my 15 years of working in secondary and further education teaching sociology with opportunities to work at a more regional and national level on projects focused on sociology and employment. For example, I will be running a webinar event in the autumn for the British Sociological Association (BSA) focused on ethical careers within sociology. At the BSA annual conference I co-ran a session focused on employability and young people.

Future possibilities

I am looking for new contributors for the upcoming podcast series. This will start in the new academic year and will take the format of a panel discussion. Topics will include education, families, crime, stratification, media, culture and identity. Please get in touch if you are interested in contributing. This will involve you bringing your experience of working in your particular sector, together with clear views on how your sector is either helping or hindering the development and progress of sociology as a discipline. You also need to be able to speak and discuss with panellists from different industries to you. If you are interested, please contact me on sgunessee@jcoss.barnet.sch.uk

Cost, speed, quality: two out of three ain't bad… or is it? Reflections following the 2023 Cathie Marsh lecture

By Lucia Barbone, head of best practice assurance and improvement, Office for National Statistics

In January 2023, I had the privilege of attending the 2023 Cathie Marsh lecture at the Royal Statistical Society. The lecture brought together experts for a strategic discussion on the post-pandemic future of surveys. The Covid-19 pandemic brought unprecedented changes to survey development, including a reduction or a loss of pre-testing and pilot stages, necessary for a fast response. There are shared concerns about these changes becoming the 'new normal' and their implications for quality. The debate focused on 'should this way of working become the new normal?' The lecture and following question and answer session are available to view on YouTube. The following are some of my reflections in my capacity as head of best practice assurance and improvement at ONS.

Surveys: the great comeback

Turns out, it wasn't the first time the future of surveys was discussed at Cathie Marsh lectures: there are at least another three covering surveys. This demonstrates the intense debate ongoing, with some ready to declare surveys a thing of the past. Detractors present newer, better, more innovative data sources (admin data, anyone?) as the silver bullet for analysis. But every time, surveys come back stronger than before. Survey data was crucial during the pandemic, with admin data not being able to provide the required data about behaviours and opinions. Has Covid-19 been the 'last nail in the coffin' against the silver bullet narrative about non-survey data? The jury is still out on that…

Rushing the purpose will backfire

When evidence is being questioned and scrutinised like never before, the real question to address is what fitness for purpose (quality) really means. We often look at the dimensions of quality, which are helpful in considering trade-offs, but we shouldn't forget about the overall picture. How do we really assess data as good enough? The key is in the purpose. A crisis like the pandemic rallied us all behind one purpose: understanding how many people had the virus (noting that even this wasn't a straightforward question). Now, in a post-crisis world, we need to (re)acknowledge that identifying the purpose is a complex and difficult stage of the process; that design and testing are key to providing assurance on it; and this simply cannot be rushed through by default. Any saving at this stage is just an inefficiency-in-waiting.

Quality at pace but only through collaboration

Moving fast is possible, but it does come with costs and other implications. Shortening the design stage increases the pressure for the middle of the lifecycle to deliver quality, with the risk of methods being pushed beyond their intended possibilities. Triangulation of multiple sources becomes paramount. Lack of pre-testing needs to be mitigated through retrospective testing and development, with real-time respondents' engagement, and the use of paradata or coding data. This requires more collaboration across the lifecycle, across industries, and so more resources focused on a single project at any point in time. The question would then be: is this the best and more efficient way to work? My answer, as an economist, would be 'it depends'.

Risk: the missing quality dimension?

Crises push us to take more risks, and with good reason. In some cases, this can lead to learning and innovation, as for data collection during the pandemic. New technologies and modes were deployed, and the resilience of our strategies and systems was duly tested. Risk is a strong component of how we think about quality, and for our delivery decisions. We need to make sure that our quality discussions include discussing risk. Only with a description of the risks taken when shortening design stages, can users make informed decisions, meaning that we can really deliver data that is fit for purpose.

I would like to finish this article with a challenging question… Is it now time that we consider including risk as one of the quality dimensions?

The pandemic period saw extraordinary efforts by the data-collection community to provide key data to inform decisions. Boundaries were pushed, and lessons learned. Adopting the 'pandemic way' as the new normal in all situations has implications for costs and risks to quality that cannot be underestimated nor justified for all circumstances. Any way of future working needs to be proportionate and suitable.

Pillars of the future

By Ed Dunn, senior director, Population Studies, Kantar Public

(linkedin.com/in/ed-dunn-2315a5253)

It's been a few months now since data collection for the Covid Infection Study (CIS) paused: an action that likely symbolises the end of a period of unprecedented challenge and change to social data collection. I certainly won't forget while at ONS the long hours invested in developing the CIS study, or just under a year later the planning that went into delivering a census safely and to the quality that users demanded. I'll remember this period for the amazing sense of purpose, and because it demonstrates what can be achieved in the most challenging of circumstances.

In my new role, at Kantar Public, I am giving a lot of thought to what happens next and how we shape the future, rather than reinstate the past. I'm not alone, because as Kantar Public establishes itself as a standalone, purpose-driven global business (we divested from the Kantar Group in 2022) providing evidence and insight to support decision-making across the public realm, we are focusing on the future, and specifically the future of evidence. There will be more to come on this but, for now, my thoughts are very much on the future of survey-based evidence, as I spoke about at the Cathie Marsh lecture earlier this year.

It's a challenging task. The survey sands have shifted and, indeed, are still shifting. One thing though is certain. As we move away from the pandemic, we must look forward and not back to how things were. In considering how we do this, I've used three central pillars – context, collaboration and competition – to frame my thinking.

Seeing survey-based research in the context of a wider system is important. The survey environment is a complex and shifting interaction of methods, participant behaviours and wider societal factors, rather than the product of individual fixed components. Previous debate on the future of survey research has frequently pitched surveys against other disciplines or sources of evidence. At Kantar Public we are seeking to embrace and blend, not compete. For example, by adopting

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the principles of systems thinking – a type of multi-disciplinary analysis of factors and interactions that contribute to an outcome – to apply to the data itself, we can provide additional value and insight by examining what was going on in the wider environment when a particular attitude or behaviour was captured. Similarly, what wider social, cultural or environmental factors are at play that influence respondent participation? Bring the responsible use of artificial intelligence into the mix, and there are some very powerful opportunities indeed.

As has been widely acknowledged, the pandemic response showed the power of collaboration, and this is still vital. At Kantar Public, we are looking forward to taking part in the ESRC Survey Data Collection Collaboration alongside many others in the social research community.

The recent publication of Kantar Public's research into the development of an online victimisation survey is a good example of our ongoing commitment to sharing knowledge and best practice. Indeed, from sharing what works to a strengthened focus on survey harmonisation, there is much that an enhanced level of collaboration across the wider social research community can contribute.

While the significant investments such as the ESRC collaboration or the ONS Data Collection Transformation Programme (part of which I led previously) are welcome, we must also recognise that perhaps the greatest driver of innovation is competition.

The commissioners of quality evidence and research are one of the most significant factors for strong and constructive competition. Procurements that focus on information and evidence needs, rather than highly specified requirements, and that are accompanied by meaningful pre-market engagement, allow the considerable expertise and creative thinking that exists in suppliers to really shine through and to focus on how to solve complex and nuanced problems. Tightly worded specifications seeking to reinstate the past will struggle to deliver the highest quality results. Some of the UK's longstanding household surveys face challenges in the post-Covid-19 world. How might the original information and evidence question, pitched to a flexible and responsive market, be answered?

But one question remains – what might the future mean for the participant in all of this? I'm pleased to say that, in the next edition of Research Matters, one of my former colleagues at ONS, Laura Wilson, is going to offer her view on this precise topic.

Linked health data provide new research opportunities

By Richard Silverwood, associate professor of statistics and Centre for Longitudinal Studies chief statistician, CLS, UCL Social Research Institute

Over recent years the national longitudinal cohort studies run by the UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies have been linked to routinely collected health data, alongside other sources of administrative data. Such linkages can enhance the research value of cohort studies through access to information on cohort members that would not otherwise be available.

Data linkage

Here, I discuss the linkage between the 1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS) and Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data as a specific example. NCDS is an ongoing cohort following an initial 17,415 people born in Great Britain in a single week of 1958, while the HES databases contain information about admissions, accident and emergency attendances and outpatient appointments at NHS hospitals in England. The period of HES data availability differs by dataset, with admissions data being available earliest (from 1997). Each HES dataset provides information on admission and discharge or appointment dates, diagnoses, procedures and basic patient demographics.

The NCDS-HES linkage was undertaken on the basis of consent obtained at NCDS sweep 8, when cohort members were age 50. Matching was conducted by NHS Digital using deterministic linkage based on combinations of the participant's name, sex, date of birth and postcode. 10,535 NCDS cohort members lived in England at one or more sweeps over the period

of HES data availability (our definition of 'linkage eligibility', since HES concerns only English hospitals). Of these, 8,403 responded at NCDS sweep 8, with 6,593 providing consent for linkage (consent rate = 78.5%). Among linkage consenters, 6,119 had successfully linked HES data (linkage rate = 92.8%). The linked data are available to researchers via the UK Data Service.

It is important to evaluate the quality of data linkages to discern the likely reliability of ensuing research. We have undertaken extensive analyses to examine the linkage quality of the NCDS-HES linkage and to evaluate the population representativeness of the linked sample (Silverwood et al, 2022).

Opportunities

The data linkage provides the opportunity for novel analyses, whereby the detailed information from routinely collected health data can be harnessed alongside the rich life-history data of the cohort study to address important questions for society, health and related policies. For example, HES data on diagnoses and treatments enable identification of specific mental and physical health problems which may not be (well) captured in the cohort data. The linked HES data are relatively complete from a representation perspective, and generally high quality with regards measurement.

Linked data also have the potential to benefit cohort-based analyses in more subtle ways, for example by providing information on factors which may be related to the underlying reasons for the incompleteness that affects cohort data. We have recently explored whether including HES variables which

are predictive of subsequent NCDS non-response in missing data methods can help restore NCDS sample representativeness (Rajah et al, 2023).

Challenges

Systematic differences between individuals consenting and not consenting to linkage is a general issue when linking datasets on the basis of consent. Selective attrition prior to the point at which consent was sought is an additional consideration in the context of longitudinal cohort studies. Both can potentially cause bias in analyses of the linked sample.

Furthermore, as HES data are not collected for research purposes, there can be missing or poorly completed information, with variability in coding practices between hospitals and over time.

To conclude, it is clear that linkages between cohort studies and routinely collected health data provide exciting opportunities for substantive and methodological research, but both the linkage process itself and any subsequent analyses must be carefully and thoughtfully undertaken.

References

Rajah, N., Calderwood, L., De Stavola, B.L. et al. (2023). Using linked Hospital Episode Statistics data to better handle non-response and restore sample representativeness in the National Child Development Study. CLS Working Paper Series 2023/1. London: UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies.

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Positive history: care and testimony

By Amy Proctor, archivist, London Metropolitan Archives

London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) has recently undertaken a project to make accessible to researchers three archive collections. These illuminate important threads of the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and its aftermath including pioneering medical treatment, care and support and the lived experience of not only those diagnosed with HIV and AIDS related illness but also their carers, partners, relatives and friends.

The archives

The three archives are those of Mildmay Hospital, interviews conducted by the National HIV Story Trust and the archives of Positively UK.

The Mildmay Hospital has its origins in the 1860s as a charity providing care to the local community. However, in the 1980s, it became Europe's first hospice dedicated to providing care to those with HIV and AIDS. The collection includes administrative records and patient case files.

The collection from the National HIV Story Trust comprises 103 filmed interviews of people with AIDS, their families, partners and carers.

Positively UK (formerly Positively Women) is a peer-led support charity which was founded in 1987 by two women who realised that there were no peer-led services for women at that time.

Unlocking the collections

The overall vision of the project has been to make these records accessible for research, not only to academic researchers, but also to those affected by HIV/AIDS and to the wider public. Two project archivists have been working on the collections.

In order to make access points into the collections, we have had to manage unique approaches to balance confidentiality and access to data. For example, the patient case files are subject to access restrictions due to data protection legislation. However, in recognition of their importance, one of the project archivists has reviewed each file and extracted information to create a research database. This includes details of medical information, such as illnesses and medication, but also information which brings out

patients' experience such as their living conditions, family circumstances and aims for the hospital admission.

The oral histories have been made accessible digitally with the archivist creating time-coded summaries of the content and complete transcriptions and captioning of the films. This level of detailed cataloguing is very time-consuming but allows for the richness and the importance of the narratives contained within the collections to be accessible.

Releasing the voices

The corporate records of Mildmay Hospital and the archives of Positively UK have been catalogued with file- and collection-level descriptions available to view on the LMA online collections catalogue. The filmed interviews and metadata are available on site via LMA's Mediatheque. For access to the patient case file database, researchers should contact LMA.

LMA is open to researchers from Monday to Thursday. For details of our location, opening times and history card registration visit the visitor information pages at www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/lma or contact our enquiry team on 020 7332 3820.

Exploring the quality of administrative data using qualitative methods

By Connaire Pearce, Ella Williams Davies, Jenny Knight and Karina Williams, Methodological Research Hub, Office for National Statistics

Office for National Statistics

Using administrative data for statistical purposes: opportunities and challenges

ONS is carrying out research to explore alternative data sources for use within its official statistics. One type of such data is 'administrative data'. Administrative data are data which have been collected during the operation of an organisation. The government produces a large amount of administrative data, providing a valuable resource for operational and, potentially, statistical purposes.

ONS wants to understand how inclusive and representative administrative data are when we use them for our statistical purposes. We want to understand what statistical adjustments or additional sources may be needed to ensure the resulting statistics are of a high quality for our statistical purposes. In the research described here, we have tried to understand these concepts through an innovative qualitative method. We define administrative data inclusivity and representativeness as follows.

‣ Inclusivity is the extent to which groups or individuals are included in administrative data. An example of a lack of inclusivity would be members of a group or groups not being present on administrative data. There may also be groups where there is over-coverage. Over-coverage happens when you have additional units in your data that should not be included. Common causes for over-coverage include

individuals who have left the country (emigrated) and not deregistered and are therefore wrongly still included in the administrative data.

‣ Representativeness is the extent to which administrative data reflect communities' or individuals' characteristics. Examples of a lack of representation would be (a) being present in administrative data without having characteristics recorded and/or (b) being present on administrative data, but members of the community/communities or public being classified differently to how they should be recorded.

Using qualitative methods to help understand administrative data inclusivity and representativeness

Our research was guided by a working group of demographic topic experts. Due to the size of the topic, we narrowed the scope to selected population groups as a pilot. Decisions about which groups to focus on were based on input from topic experts, research, and the needs of ONS. Participants were purposively sampled and qualitatively interviewed. A different sample was produced for each group. The three groups we researched were based on:

‣ Ethnic group (Black African, Polish, and Eastern European, and Black Caribbean)

‣ individuals who had emigrated

‣ individuals who have knowledge and insight of people experiencing homelessness. For example, representatives from homelessness charities

We used a semi-structured cognitive interviewing style approach by exploring the impact of registration questions and using example questions as elicitation aids. Interview questions were designed so we could understand:

‣ whether selected population groups are registered with any public services and whether they access them

‣ how selected population groups provide information about themselves when registering for public services (for instance, through a form, or via telephone)

‣ how selected population groups complete questions

‣ how and if selected population groups update information held by public services

We analysed interviews through a deductive thematic approach, and we added emerging themes as we progressed.

Innovative methods to help understand administrative data inclusivity and representativeness

There are two main innovations from this research:

1. Looking at administrative data inclusivity and representativeness during the data-collection stage: we collected information from members of the public and charities to understand how selected population groups complete their information. We did not collect their actual data: we just gained insights on how members of the communities complete their information.

2. Choice of methods: using a qualitative approach provided deeper understanding of administrative data inclusivity and representativeness. This is innovative as qualitative approaches are not commonly used when doing research into administrative data.

Why our research has impact

This research was designed to add to existing work on administrative data at ONS. Its insights may be new or may provide further evidence to support pre-existing assumptions and theories about the inclusivity and representativeness of administrative data. These insights can be combined with our knowledge of the topic, such as through quantitative methods or research to provide recommendations on future actions.

We recommend that the outcomes from this research are considered alongside other information to help inform decisions and next steps such as:

◗ how ONS processes such data

◗ what methods to use

◗ what additional sources may be needed

◗ how to communicate our statistics and findings to the public

Our research findings could also aid research into developing harmonised standards for administrative data collection from public services.

Next steps

We have completed the first iteration and intend to conduct further research using this method. The next iteration will involve developing guidelines on how to assess inclusivity and representativeness in administrative data.

We want to hear from you

Please get in touch at Methods.Research@ons.gov.uk if you:

◗ have suggestions for areas/topics we should research

◗ are interested in hearing about our research or in collaborating with us

Further information

More information about this project, including findings and examples of our research.

Discounted insurance packages for SRA members

The SRA's aims to support the social research community extend far beyond research practice and expertise. Recently, we have been searching for meaningful savings on day-to-day costs facing those working in research.

Last month we were pleased to launch a partnership with PIB Insurance Brokers to offer discounts on a range of insurance packages including public liability, professional indemnity, cyber, legal fees and personal effects. This agreement provides packages from seven mainstream composite insurers with an exclusive discount to SRA members of between 5% and 10%. Less than a month after launch, we're pleased to say that this partnership has already delivered savings to SRA members.

For more information or for a quote, members should log in to the website, then navigate to the 'discounted insurance' section under the 'members' menu bar. Or, you can email admin@the-sra.org.uk for more information.

Need ethical review of your research plans?

Last year the SRA launched a service to provide an independent ethical review of research projects and proposals. It's aimed at organisations and individuals who need a project or proposal reviewed, but can't access this themselves. It's led by Dr Ron Iphofen, a recognised expert in research ethics who has worked with the SRA for many years, and the reviewers are drawn from the researchers who volunteer for the SRA Ethics Consultancy Forum, so have wide experience in this area. Just to note this is not a REC (research ethics committee) so it does not give formal 'approval'.

The service can give a quick turnaround if needed. To date five appraisals have been carried out and clients have expressed their appreciation for the suggestions and advice provided. The appraisers are paid, so there is a charge for this service. Find out more on the SRA website.

Get engaged with SRA North

By Georgina Culliford, research manager, Qa Research and chair of SRA North

The SRA not only runs a UK-wide offer, but has regional sub-groups to further support researchers who aren't based in London. Currently these are Scotland, Wales and 'the North' – which covers any researchers based in the north of England.

Purpose and the ethos of SRA North

1. Connection and networking: 'the North' is a vast and varied place, which houses a huge range of research organisations and institutions as well as a vibrant community of freelancers. But how often does the research community get to meet each other? We aim to create opportunities for researchers around the region to connect and converse.

2. Showcasing northern research: inviting speakers from around the North to share their research, skills and expertise. Themed events and webinars aim to show just how much fantastic work goes on throughout the region that others within and beyond the area can learn from.

SRA welcomes new chair

I've recently had the privilege of taking over as chair of SRA North. As background, I'm a naturalised northerner, having studied at the Universities of Sheffield and Leeds, and never managing to leave Yorkshire. I'm currently a research manager at Qa Research, a social research agency based in York – my specialities are hard-to-reach groups and health research.

I've been involved with SRA North for three years. I love that I get to step outside my day-to-day job and talk to people from all corners of the region and all parts of the sector, from academia to charity to government social research. It gives me a new sense of perspective and invigorates my work.

I'm particularly passionate about regional groups as, in my early career, I found myself trying to squeeze into the London networking scene despite never having lived there and never wanting to. What if there was a way to meet other researchers up here that suits the pace, geography and way of life in the North? I hope to achieve something like this in my time as chair, and will always listen to what fellow researchers want to see.

And of course, there's so much vibrancy and fascinating work going on up here, and we can always shout about it more.

What we plan to do

We have a small committee of friendly, dedicated researchers from different organisations and backgrounds, who all volunteer their time to put on events and build opportunities for northern researchers. Over this year, we plan to:

◗ put on one in-person event in Leeds about early careers in social research

◗ trial in-person informal networking sessions in each of the main northern cities

◗ continue to put on topic-based webinars showcasing northern-based research

◗ build our online presence

Recruiting new committee members

As part of these upcoming plans, we're looking to recruit a few new committee members who can support this. Committee members will be:

◗ based in the north of England

◗ working in social research or studying social research

◗ any career stage – we are particularly keen for representation from researchers early on in their career

◗ able to attend an online committee meeting every two to three months

◗ able to assist with planning and promoting SRA North activities

◗ able to work on a volunteer basis

We are particularly looking for someone to support us with social media. This would involve tweeting on a semi-regular basis and building a social media community with the support of the committee.

In return you will get:

◗ opportunity to meet and work closely with a friendly group of researchers based in the North

◗ experience of planning events/social media promotion

◗ experience of being part of a committee

◗ opportunity to give back to the social research sector and to build a positive space for northern-based researchers

If you're interested, please do get in touch to learn more: north@the-sra.org.uk

Branch contacts

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@sracymru

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@SRANorth

SRA Scotland
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@SRA_Scotland

Narrative inquiry. Philosophical roots

Vera Caine, D. Jean Clandinin and Sean Lessard
BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC, 2022
Reviewed by Rachel Hughes, founder and company director, Dotiau Ltd
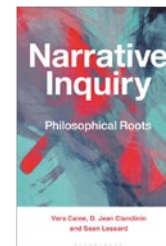
Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research. It involves using stories, texts, journals, conversations, interviews, photos to help us understand how people create meaning in their lives. In *Narrative inquiry. Philosophical roots*, the authors explore narrative inquiry both as a way of undertaking research and analysis, and also the philosophies behind it.

The book is divided into five sections grouped around a set of ideas such as experience, temporality, relationality, living within and on landscapes, and imagination. Each chapter is written as a standalone essay on a particular idea in narrative inquiry. At the end of each section, the authors include methodological notebooks in which

they show the link to, and the relevance of, their thinking to narrative inquiry as methodology.

This structure enables readers to explore ideas that are most relevant to their work and/or interest. For this reason, I found the chapters on place, community, knowledge, and political and social landscapes particularly helpful.

The authors' approach is strongly focused on people's lives, and consequently, on their experience. They see theory as interrelated with practices, experience and people's lives. These lead you to exploring and using different theories.

While this book is aimed at the academic community, for people

(re)designing public services, exploring people's experience is an important starting point. The spaces and places that public bodies, third sector organisations and alike are working in are inherently complex. Using a narrative approach to their work would enable them to better understand this complexity.

I think there is space for the ideas presented in this book to be packaged in a way that is useful for those outside academia. This would help to support them to explore, with confidence, ways to inquire into experience, and to legitimise narrative inquiry as methodology and phenomenon in the public policy space.

Titles for review

We are always looking for reviewers (SRA members only). Write a short review for us and you get to keep the book. 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 – sixth edition
David Silverman
SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

Doing qualitative research online – second edition
Janet E Salmons
SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

Doing visual ethnography – fourth edition
Sarah Pink
SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021

Essential skills for early career researchers
Joseph Roche
SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

Experimental designs
Barak Ariel, Matthew Bland and Alex Sutherland
SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

Qualitative research for quantitative researchers
Helen Kara
SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

Work placements, internships & applied social research
Jackie Carter
SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021

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

28 June: Theory-based evaluation: options and choices, with Professor David Parsons

29 June: Research and evaluation project management, with Sally Cupitt

14 September (IN PERSON, IN EDINBURGH): Impact evaluation (advanced), with Professor David Parsons

15 September (IN PERSON, IN EDINBURGH): Building a theory of change, with Professor David Parsons

20 September: Foundations of evaluation, with Sally Cupitt

28 September: Research and evaluation project management, with Sally Cupitt

4 October: Impact evaluation (advanced), with Professor David Parsons

Qualitative

16 June (IN PERSON, IN LONDON): Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

3 & 4 July (2 afternoons): Creative data analysis, with Dr Nicole Brown

5 July (IN PERSON, IN LONDON): Qualitative interviewing, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

6 July (IN PERSON, IN LONDON): Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

7 July: Narratives and storytelling in qualitative research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

11 July: Writing up qualitative data, with Dr Karen Lumsden

14 July: Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

22 August: Foundations of qualitative research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

24 August: Conducting online focus groups, with Dr Karen Lumsden

25 August: Introduction to qualitative interviewing, with Dr Karen Lumsden

12 to 14 September (3 part-days): Designing and moderating focus groups, with National Centre for Social Research

14 & 15 September: Positional and reflexivity in qualitative research, with Dr Nicole Brown

22 September: Narrative analysis, with Dr Karen Lumsden

28 & 29 September (2 full days): Depth interviewing skills, with National Centre for Social Research

6 October: Digital qualitative interviewing, with Dr Karen Lumsden

9 & 10 October (2 part-days): Managing challenging interviews, with National Centre for Social Research

11 October (IN PERSON, IN LONDON): Conducting focus groups, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

12 October (IN PERSON, IN LONDON): Qualitative interviewing, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

13 October (IN PERSON, IN LONDON): Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

26 & 27 October (2 mornings): Introduction to qualitative research, with National Centre for Social Research

2 November: Reporting qualitative data, with National Centre for Social Research

13 to 15 November (3 part-days): Analysis of qualitative data, with National Centre for Social Research

15 November (IN PERSON, IN LONDON): Introduction to ethnographic methods, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

16 November (IN PERSON, IN LONDON): Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

17 November (IN PERSON, IN LONDON): Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

Quantitative

20 to 22 June (3 afternoons): Correlation, linear and logistic regression with R, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

27 & 28 June (2 afternoons): Web survey design, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

5 & 6 July (2 afternoons): Questionnaire design, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

12 July: Understanding statistical concepts and essential tests, with Dr Valerija Kolbas

12 & 13 September (2 afternoons): Imputation and weighting, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

15 September: Data management and visualisation using R. with Dr Alexandru Cernat

20 & 21 September (2 mornings): Cognitive interviewing, with National Centre for Social Research

4 October: Introduction to sampling for social researchers, with Dr Alexandru Cernat

5 October: Introduction to R, with Dr Alexandru Cernat

24 to 26 October (3 afternoons): Advanced questionnaire design, with Dr Pamela Campanell

Other research skills

13 June: Introduction to participatory action research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

16 June (IN PERSON, IN LONDON): Research with children and young people, with Berni Graham

12 July (IN PERSON, IN LONDON): Graphic design know-how for social researchers, with Lulu Pinney

14 July: Introduction to ethnographic methods, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

11 September: Data visualisation and infographic design, with Nigel Hawtin

27 & 28 September (2 mornings): Research with children and young people, with Berni Graham

23 October: Introduction to mixed methods research, with Drs Sarah Jasmin and Ruth Plackett

10 November: Writing effective research reports, with Professor Simon Haslam

20 November: Consultancy skills for social researchers, 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.

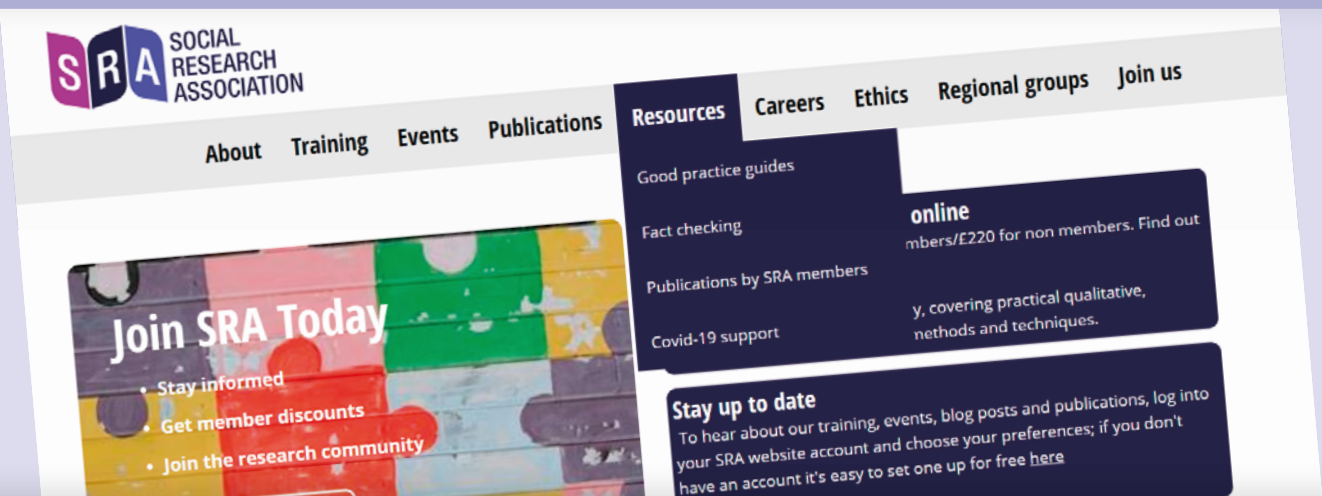## Ethics
www.the-sra.org.uk/ethics

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.

Edited by Shirley Henderson www.shirleyhenderson.co.uk   Designed by www.graphics.coop

research matters

Views expressed by individual contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the SRA.

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