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Editorial

Richard Bartholomew
Editor

Welcome to this ninth issue of Social Research Practice.

In **From headline statistics to lived experiences: a new approach to measuring the poverty premium** Andrea Finney and Sara Davies describe their ingenious study to obtain more realistic and disaggregated estimates of the ‘poverty premium’ – that is those additional costs poor households incur as a direct result of having very low incomes. For example, having to use prepayment meters or cards, or having to use more expensive local convenience stores because they have no car or find public transport too expensive. The study used a creative combination of conceptual work, costing exercises, surveys and cluster analysis to understand the heterogeneity of people’s experiences of the poverty premium.

How to pay for long-term social care is one of the most vexed policy questions of today. Arguably it was Prime Minister Theresa May’s misjudged proposals on this which derailed her 2017 election campaign. But asking people who they think should pay and how much is very challenging. In **Using vignettes to examine preferences for paying for long-term social care in online and interview surveys** Bob Erens and colleagues show how they developed a set of vignettes or scenarios describing different types of need to test out people’s views. At the same time, they were able to compare the validity of two different survey approaches to eliciting the views of those aged 65 to 75 – an online panel and a face-to-face omnibus survey based on a random location sample design. Their results suggest that concerns over data quality in online surveys may be misplaced. As ever, it is the representativeness of the samples used which is crucial.

Using objects to help elicit responses in qualitative interviews is a well-established technique, especially for discussions with children and members of vulnerable groups. Using objects can help to ‘break the ice’, overcome shyness and engage people, notably when discussing sensitive or personal topics. But how much does it matter what types of objects are used and how they were made? In **Handmade object elicitation: using handmade objects to prompt richer interview data**, Ian Blackwell explores the advantages of using objects handmade by young children and their fathers at four ‘dads’ groups’. Importantly, the children were encouraged to select objects that had meaning to them, and this allowed them more control of the flow and content of the semi-structured interview.

Our two research notes look at different aspects of the research process itself. Firstly, the advantages and challenges of using co-productive approaches in research (**Co-producing research with people who have experienced severe and multiple disadvantages** by Kerry Dowding). Secondly, the views of junior researchers, based on their own experiences, on how research awards can be used more effectively to develop the practical experience and skills of those embarking on research careers (**Capacity building in practice: how involving early career researchers in research awards can contribute to their development** by James Fletcher et al).

We welcome proposals for new articles or shorter research notes. If you are interested in offering a research note or a full article you can find more information on the [SRA website](#).

From headline statistics to lived experiences: a new approach to measuring the poverty premium

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Abstract

The poverty premium, when households pay more for essential goods and services because they are poor, remains a problem in the UK today. Previous attempts to measure it, however, have been crude. This research aimed to take the measurement of the poverty premium beyond an illustrative figure to something which better reflects the lived experiences of poorer households. To achieve this, we developed a conceptual framework to understand how the poverty premium arises, taking a process-driven rather than a traditional sector-based approach to identify components of the poverty premium. We then calculated a typical cost for each component and surveyed lower-income households to measure exposure to them. The average poverty premium incurred was £490. Finally, cluster analysis explored the underlying heterogeneity of the poverty premium. Importantly, our approach reveals the breadth and depth of people's experience of the poverty premium and the pathways which contribute to it. It has highlighted the implications of behaviour and constraint for effective practice and policy intervention, and will make it possible to monitor the poverty premium more accurately and meaningfully over time.

Funding acknowledgement

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Introduction

Given that poverty describes, rather simply, a lack of resources (Townsend, 1979), the notion that poorer households should then pay more to access essential goods and services than better-off households is counter-intuitive. However, the term 'poverty premium' was first coined in 1960s USA (Caplovitz, 1963) to reflect the recognition that poor households were indeed paying more for their essential goods and services **because** they were poor. Sadly, the poverty premium remains a real and important issue in the UK today, and represents structural disadvantage for those least able to afford it (for example Strelitz and Lister, 2008; Bevan, 2009; Stewart, 2010; Hirsch, 2013; Richards, 2015).

A resurgence in interest began in 2007 with work by Save the Children and Family Welfare, which estimated the poverty premium to be just over £1,000. By 2010, the poverty premium had risen to an estimated £1,300 per family per year (Save the Children, 2010). These estimates were important in raising the profile of the problem, stimulating discussion and informing the social policies needed to resolve it (for example Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016).

However, there were significant limitations to the estimates from these studies. They were essentially illustrative figures, and for the low-income households they were intended to relate to, they remained hypothetical. In particular, the calculation of the premium was predicated on the assumption that a low-income household incurred all of the individual elements of the premium, from a home contents insurance premium costing £32 to buying a cooker costing an extra £430 (Save the Children, 2010). Yet, in reality, any given household may or may not incur a particular premium. Qualitative research has shown not only how profound the impact of the poverty premium can be on households, but also that exposure to it can vary widely (Cambium Advocacy, 2015). Without knowing the breadth and depth of the lived experience of the poverty premium, these headline figures risked overstating the scale of the poverty premium, and potentially directing disproportionate amounts of policy attention to costly but relatively uncommon poverty premiums. In addition, poverty itself was not always established clearly as a key contributory factor in the extra costs arising and this could also risk overstating the reality of the poverty premium. As such, the estimates were limited in the extent to which they reflected the reality of households' experiences.

Our research (Davies et al, 2016a) undertook to measure, comprehensively, the poverty premium as it exists in Britain today. Our aim was to seek a new approach to measuring lower-income households' exposure to the poverty premium which better reflected their lived experiences of it; something previous studies had not done. This would relate poverty as a key, contributory factor to additional costs arising (defining the premium as a poverty premium) and reflect households' actual and varied exposure to these extra costs in their daily lives.

The measurement challenge

The study we conducted was ambitious; not just to take the measurement of the poverty premium beyond a nominal figure of what this extra cost could represent to poorer households, but also to reconceptualise the poverty premium to better reflect its contemporary nature. This ambition permeated throughout our approach: from how we thought about the essential living costs potentially affected by a poverty premium; through how we measured exposure to the poverty premium among lower-income households; to how we explored the different exposure of different groups of lower-income households.

We carried out the research in 2016 in three linked stages:

- ▮ First, we undertook a conceptualisation exercise to identify the range of poverty premium components which exist today. This needed to take account of the changing poverty premium landscape and identify the pathways through which a poverty premium could be understood to arise. From this, we developed a new measurement framework, which we validated in focus groups
- ▮ Second, we completed a costing exercise to identify a representative, nominal cost for each component in the final measurement framework. At this stage, we also undertook a survey of lower-income households to measure exposure to each one. This enabled us to calculate the average, lived cost of the poverty premium given the depth (the nominal cost) of each component and its breadth (percentage of households experiencing it)
- ▮ Finally, we carried out cluster analysis of the survey data to explore the heterogeneity of the lower-income households' experiences of the poverty premium. This identified significant variations in households' experiences and highlighted important socio-demographic drivers of these

For the purposes of this study, we defined lower-income households as those with incomes equivalised for household size of below 70% of national median income by life-stage (working age or state-pension age). This ensured that we included those whose incomes were below the relative poverty threshold,¹ **and** those above the threshold whose low incomes still resulted in them incurring poverty premiums.

¹ 60% median income equivalised for household size.

We used a mixed-methods design, which included an extensive review of empirical literature of poverty, money management and the poverty premium; a desk-based review of the sectors in which a poverty premium might arise; and a costing exercise to identify representative nominal costs for each component in the final measurement framework. We also undertook seven focus groups in England and Scotland with lower-income householders of working and state-pension age. We developed a bespoke questionnaire to capture the main components of the poverty premium in a nationally representative face-to-face omnibus survey, with a final sample of 947 lower-income householders. A stakeholder group of research, industry and charity experts convened specially for the study was consulted at all key stages of the research. For more details about the fieldwork and definitions see Davies et al (2016b).

Stage 1: from poverty to the poverty premium: developing a new framework

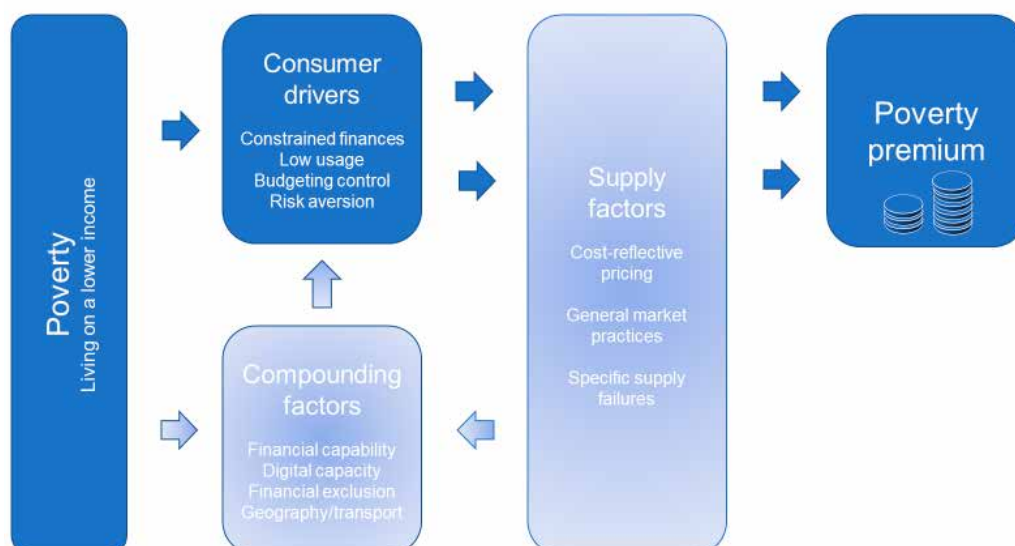
In creating a new measurement framework to account for the poverty premium as it exists today, we needed to establish, front and centre, the extra costs that can occur when people buy essential goods and services, which could constitute a poverty premium. Our overriding concern lay in establishing that any extra costs lower-income households incurred had their roots in poverty. Viewing the poverty premium through the lens of the consumer was at the heart of this.

Developing a new conceptual underpinning

Unlike previous research, our approach involved developing a conceptual model which emphasised the behavioural pathways through which poverty leads to the poverty premium. This saw the poverty premium as arising from the circumstances, needs, choices and constraints of lower-income households, including the interaction of these with other factors. To ensure that our initial conceptualisation remained grounded in the lived experiences of lower-income households, we drew heavily on the empirical research literature of experiences of poverty and of household money management in this context. Key elements of our initial model were then refined and validated through focus groups with people in or near poverty and the stakeholder group convened specially for the project.

The final conceptual model (Figure 1) summarises the main pathways from poverty ('living on a lower-income') to the poverty premium. It emphasises the direct role of low incomes on consumption behaviour in dark shading and the indirect role of supply and other compounding factors in light shading.

Figure 1: Conceptualising pathways to the poverty premium



Drivers, factors and their interactions

The key influences in the model come from the ‘consumer drivers’, or demand-side factors. For lower-income households these relate to how those with constrained finances behave; the difficulties in affording lump-sum and up-front costs and accessing money quickly; the lower spending power realised through low usage, including in smaller, more frequent shopping trips; and the need for insurance for smaller minimum values. The need for tight budgeting control in lower-income households can also result in smaller, more frequent shops and a preference for cash spending, prepayment meters or paper billing. Finally, limited resources can make lower-income households averse to risks such as unexpected costs, leading to more costly billing or payment method choices and a reluctance to switch providers (for example Davidson et al, 2016; Gregory, 2015; Toynbee Hall, 2014).

However, consumer drivers do not exist in isolation. Hirsch (2013) identified three main types of supply-side factors – cost-reflective pricing, general market practices and specific supply failures – which contribute to the higher prices that lower-income households pay. In effect, supply factors act as a structural filter in the marketplace, shaping the choices that lower-income households have available to them; in some cases taking those choices away (such as access to affordable credit) and in others offering new choices (such as higher-cost credit). The role of supply markets can be more profound when providers charge low users more because they are considered more expensive to serve, as is often claimed for fuel prepayment meters (for example Save the Children, 2010; McBride and Purcell, 2014).

However, supply structures also shape consumer behaviour through compounding factors. Compounding factors describe influences on behaviour that occur across the income spectrum but are more prevalent or pronounced among lower-income households. These encompass difficulties choosing products (financial capability); lower rates of internet access or digital literacy (digital capacity); no or limited access to appropriate affordable financial products (financial exclusion); and where people live (geography/transport) as barriers to getting the best prices for goods and services (for example Finney and Hayes, 2015; Helsper, 2008; Tinson et al, 2014).

Crucially, the interaction of factors emerged as important, and this was clearly demonstrated in the ongoing ‘marketisation’ of essential services. The assumption that a competitive market confers power on consumers to switch to better deals in fact disproportionately disadvantages those lower-income households which may stand to benefit financially but are not only risk averse, and may also lack the financial capability or digital inclusion to make those switching choices. Thus, while a ‘loyalty penalty’ (Citizens Advice, 2018) may not obviously arise from poverty, the factors that affect those in poverty or affect them more acutely – an aversion to direct debit, a bad credit score, or imposed supply methods – together, make it harder for them to get a good deal.

The importance of pathways

Conceptualising the pathway for each potential component individually, from poverty to poverty premium, conferred two key advantages. First, those components for which a contributory pathway of poverty could be evidenced were supported for inclusion in our measurement framework, while those for which poverty was not clearly evidenced (such as school uniforms) could be excluded. The analysis of compounding factors, in particular, enabled us to exclude costs which arose purely due to other factors, such as age or living in a rural area.

Second, it enabled us to identify overlaps between components and to reconcile potential double-counting. For example, the reasons why lower-income households might shop in convenience stores included low usage, budgeting control and lack of private transport. Counting transport costs as a poverty premium in this context as well as a shopping premium would be to double count. Accounting for the use of higher-cost credit allowed us to capture the premiums some people on lower incomes pay when they cover the bulky expense of Christmas or white goods, again without double-counting these.

Validating a new measurement framework

Our conceptual model produced a list of poverty premium components for further empirical investigation. A desk-analysis of the markets quickly identified that some potential components were outdated and no longer carried a premium in 2016. For example, water bills were excluded because there was no clear evidence that low-income households incurred greater costs. In other markets, such as pay-as-you-go mobiles, prices had become much more competitive in recent years.

The focus groups in turn highlighted important misconceptions about the sectors and situations in which a poverty premium might arise. For example, we found that while lower-income households were highly unlikely to switch their fuel suppliers they nonetheless felt able to negotiate good deals on their internet and TV packages: leaving a poverty premium component in one sector but not the other. We also needed to be pragmatic, which ruled out very complex potential poverty premiums, such as regressive taxation, savings interest rates and transportation costs (though noting that the last is partly addressed through the shopping premium). While this meant potentially understating the size of the poverty premium, albeit in known ways, understating the poverty premium was more tenable than overstating it, in our view, for the credibility of the findings.

As a result of this empirical approach, we identified 31 individual components (detailed in appendix A) of the poverty premium for measurement in our framework, which we have classified here into four categories of: non-standard payment methods; non-standard bill methods; products and services; and accessing money (Figure 2). Significantly, our categorisation is cross-sectoral: for example, multiple sectors (fuel and telecoms) penalise lower-income consumers for preferring paper billing; and insurance also appears as a poverty premium in more than one sector. Our conceptualisation ultimately led us from a traditional sector-driven approach (which considers sectors in silos) to a process-driven approach which addresses **why** the poverty premium exists.

Figure 2: Final framework for measuring the poverty premium

Non-standard payment methods	Access to products and services
Fuel prepayment meters: electricity; gas	Not switching fuel supplier in the last two years
Payment on receipt of bill: electricity; gas	Shopping in convenience stores
Monthly insurance payments: home contents; car	Deprived area insurance: home contents; car
Using prepaid cards	Specific item insurance: appliances; mobile phone
Non-standard billing methods	Accessing money
Paper billing: electricity; gas; landline/broadband; mobile phone	Fee-charging cash machines
	Fee-charging cheque-cashing
	Using higher-cost credit

Stage 2: From hypothetical costs to lived costs

The final framework enabled us to calculate representative costs of each poverty premium component if they were incurred by lower-income households: the nominal costs of the poverty premium. It also enabled us to design questions to measure exposure to the poverty premium in the lived experiences of lower-income households.

The nominal costs of the poverty premium

Nominal costs allocated to each component needed to be single, but typical, extra costs that a lower-income household would have to pay to access goods and services as a result of their lower incomes. This involved an extensive desk exercise, calculating costs for a range of comparable products from a range of providers.

While the calculations were often complex (see Davies et al, 2016c) they were nonetheless underpinned by some general principles. The premium was calculated by comparing the cost incurred by mainstream or non-poor customers (a low-cost benchmark) with the cost incurred by customers on lower incomes. For some components, such as cash machine charges, the benchmark was zero. For others, such as household fuel, we used a typically low-cost option as the benchmark, but not the lowest in case this was not widely accessible. When using price comparison websites to source prices, we used the average of the lowest options returned; when using provider websites, we took neither the lowest nor the highest; when a single provider dominated the market, we used that provider's cost. These principles ensured the conservative calculation of nominal costs (appendix A).

Prevalence of the poverty premium and the lived costs

The resulting nominal costs illustrated the potential depth of the lived experience of the poverty premium, that is, how costly it is when it is incurred. However, these costs remained hypothetical unless low-income households actually incurred them.

Our key innovation when calculating the lived costs of the poverty premium was to estimate the prevalence of lower-income households' exposure to it. This was achieved through a nationally representative survey of lower-income households to measure households' experiences of the components in our framework.

The survey found that the poverty premium is widely experienced: nearly all lower-income households in 2016 (99%) had experienced at least one additional cost because they were poor. Nonetheless, exposure to the individual components varied considerably, from less than 1% of lower-income households incurring a premium from using a pawnbroker to 52% of households who paid more for home contents and car insurance because they lived in a deprived area (appendix A).

For each component, therefore, the survey findings provide a measure of the breadth of the poverty premium experience (percentage of households experiencing it). When applied against the depth of that experience (the nominal cost of the component) we could calculate the average, lived cost of each component. Calculating the costs of individual poverty premium components in this way enabled us to estimate the scale of the poverty premium as a realistic reflection of the lived experience of lower-income households; for the very first time. Across all components, the average total poverty premium lower-income households incurred in 2016 was £490.

Compared with the previous hypothetical cost of the poverty premium of £1,300 (Save the Children, 2010), the estimated lived cost of the poverty premium to lower-income households by this new method is much lower. However, it is still substantial. Moreover, our analysis showed how unevenly the poverty premium was experienced across lower-income households. For example, for couple families with two children it was estimated at £504 per year, or about 2.5% of average annual income. For a single-adult household it was lower at £465 per year but represented 5.5% of their annual income.

Stage 3: from lived costs to lived experiences

Having estimated the average lived cost of the poverty premium and found it varied by family type, we used cluster analysis to explore the unevenness of households' experience of the poverty premium further given their patterns of exposure to the individual components. The advantage of this, data-driven, approach was the ability to analyse the large number of components simultaneously. It could, therefore, account more adequately for the underlying heterogeneity in households' poverty premium exposure while still summarising their experiences meaningfully.

We undertook a two-stage cluster analysis to allocate lower-income households into groups, maximising the similarity of poverty premium exposure within groups while maximising differences between them (Davies et al, 2016b). This returned seven groups, typifying seven distinct patterns in the nature of households' experiences. The average poverty premium ranged from a large group incurring £350 (across three components on average) to a small group spending an estimated extra £750 (across eight components, Figure 3). We nonetheless interpreted the groups primarily from the pattern of their exposure. Alongside an analysis of each group's typical socio-demographic and other characteristics, this highlighted some of the reasons why some households may pay more than others. For the full statistics underlying Figure 3, see Davies et al (2016a).

For example, 'very highly exposed' households (incurring a poverty premium of £750 on average) were defined by their use of fuel prepayment meters, the use of higher-cost credit, and insurance-related premiums. These were often tenants in their family years, living in multi-adult households and in work. They were significantly more likely than average to own cars (adding to their exposure to insurance-related premiums) and to make internet purchases. Together, this paints a picture of lower-income consumers who were active across a number of spending areas, possibly as a result of active lifestyles.

Contrast this with the 'involuntarily exposed', who made up 20% of all lower-income households. This group also incurred a high average poverty premium (£530), in this case across five components, with fuel prepayment meters and higher-cost credit featuring highly. However, members of this group were much more clearly drawn from lower occupations and had the lowest incomes of all the groups. They were also less likely than others to have switched their fuel supplier; less likely than most groups to have made recent internet purchases; and the least likely of all the groups to have a car or home contents insurance. With their exposure to the poverty premium high relative to their means, this group was apparently financially constrained. Therefore, while households in severe poverty pay a lower poverty premium, it is because they cannot afford some of the goods and services that incur poverty premiums or else are excluded in some other way.

Figure 3: A typology of the poverty premium experience

Poverty premium experience	Average exposure	Wider characteristics	Share of lower-income households
<p>‘Very highly exposed’</p> <p>Defined by prepay meters, insurance, fee-charging cash machines and higher-cost credit</p>	<p>£750</p> <p>8 components</p>	Typically in work, tenants, car-owning and digitally-engaged	7%
<p>‘Highly exposed’</p> <p>Defined by deprived area insurance, reliance on convenience stores, fee-charging cash machines, higher-cost credit and paper billing</p>	<p>£560</p> <p>8 components</p>	Typically families, especially lone parents, in non-metropolitan urban areas and digitally-engaged	7%
<p>‘Involuntarily exposed’</p> <p>Defined by prepay meters and higher-cost credit</p>	<p>£530</p> <p>5 components</p>	Typically social tenants, lower occupations and the lowest income	20%
<p>‘Traditional money managers’</p> <p>Defined by non-standard payment methods, paper billing (fuel) and reliance on convenience stores</p>	<p>£520</p> <p>7 components</p>	Typically older, single-adult households on low-to-middle incomes, outright owners and not digitally-engaged	7%
<p>‘Controlled fuel payers’</p> <p>Defined by non-standard billing methods and non-standard payment methods for fuel</p>	<p>£500</p> <p>7 components</p>	A cross-section of households	14%
<p>‘Risk averse’</p> <p>Defined by insurance-related components</p>	<p>£500</p> <p>7 components</p>	Typically homeowners, in work with the highest incomes of all and digitally-engaged	19%
<p>‘Premium minimisers’</p> <p>Defined by typical or low exposure across the components</p>	<p>£350</p> <p>3 components</p>	A cross-section of households	26%

Conclusions

This study has calculated the lived costs of the poverty premium to lower-income households in a new measurement framework. In achieving this, it has conceptualised the pathways from poverty to the poverty premium, and it has done so with the needs, choices and constraints of the lower-income consumer at its heart. The use of a mixed-methods approach not only enabled the breadth and depth of the poverty premium to be measured, but also ensured that any components identified in the previous literature as falling within the poverty premium were tested and validated by people living on lower incomes, rather than being imposed or assumed by the researcher.

As a result of taking this new approach, we have produced a much more realistic estimate of the poverty premium, and highlighted important misconceptions about the sectors in which a poverty premium might arise. We have found the poverty premium to be smaller than previous research has identified. However, at £490 per household on average in 2016, and with very few lower-income households left untouched, it is still substantial.

We have also identified significant heterogeneity in lower-income households' experience of the poverty premium. While these differences are often underpinned by households' different needs, choices and preferences, the apparent protection of some poorer households from some poverty premium components is more than likely due to their inability to afford the essential goods and services that carry a poverty premium; instead, they simply go without.

Being able to estimate the scale of the poverty premium as an accurate and realistic reflection of the lived experience of lower-income households is important for the credibility of the poverty premium problem. It has already gained traction in industry and policy circles, in helping to shape priorities for future policy and practice. This includes informing the new Fair by Design Fund which aims to address the poverty premium in fuel, finance and insurance markets by investing in ventures which provide alternative services to people on low incomes (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017).

Moreover, a process-driven framework allows for the continued measurement and monitoring of the poverty premium as the policy and practice landscape changes. For example, since we first estimated the poverty premium in 2016, a temporary price cap on non-fixed fuel prepayment meter deals was introduced in 2017 to better align prices between payment methods. Another cap came into effect in 2019 for all customers on standard variable and default tariffs to reduce the penalty for customers who do not switch (Ofgem, 2019).

In July 2018, we updated the nominal costs to evaluate the impact of the 2017 prepayment meter price cap. We found that this cap has had a substantial effect on the gap between the average prepayment meter tariff and the best prepayment meter tariff, reducing it from £229 to just £21. At this point in time, the average prepayment meter tariff was, in fact, cheaper than the standard variable tariff paid by direct debit. This has had a knock-on effect on the poverty premium overall, which reduced 15%. Nonetheless, a gap of £174 annually remained between the average prepayment tariff cost and cost of the best online-only, direct debit tariffs. The recalculation also highlighted a large increase in insurance poverty premiums, through both geographical risk-based pricing and monthly payments.

Ultimately, a new methodology for measuring the poverty premium has not only produced a more accurate description of the nature and extent of the contemporary poverty premium. It can also be used to monitor the poverty premium experience of households over time. In doing so, it provides an opportunity to assess how each market is evolving and the extent to which changes in policy and practice – whether business-driven or from regulation – have been effective in protecting the poor in society.

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Appendix A: the nominal and lived costs of the poverty premium

Poverty premium component	Nominal annual cost	% of households incurring it	Average lived cost
Non-standard payment methods			
Fuel prepayment meter: electricity	£35	32	£11
Fuel prepayment meter: gas	£35	27	£9
Payment on receipt of bill: electricity	£38	7	£3
Payment on receipt of bill: gas	£38	7	£3
Monthly insurance payments: home contents	£9	32	£3
Monthly insurance payments: car	£81	31	£25
Fee-charging prepaid cards	£25	3	£1
Non-standard billing methods			
Paper billing: electricity	£5	26	£1
Paper billing: gas	£5	24	£1
Paper billing: landline/broadband	£23	28	£6
Paper billing: mobile phone	£23	13	£3
Product and service choices			
Not switching fuel supplier in last 2 years	£317	73	£233
Best prepayment meter tariff	£227	8	£18
Best payment on receipt tariff	£43	1	£<1
Shopping in convenience stores	£266	14	£38
Deprived area insurance: home contents	£14	52	£7
Deprived area insurance: car	£74	52	£38
Specific item insurance: household appliances	£132	13	£17
Specific item insurance: mobile phones	£60	16	£10

Poverty premium component	Nominal annual cost	% of households incurring it	Average lived cost
Access to cash			
Fee-charging cash machines	£25	27	£7
Fee-charging cheque-cashing	£30	4	£1
Higher-cost credit: rent-to-own	£315	2	£7
Higher-cost credit: payday loans	£120	1	£2
Higher-cost credit: home collection	£540	3	£17
Higher-cost credit: pawnbroking	£50	<1	£<1
Higher-cost credit: subprime personal loans	£520	1	£7
Higher-cost credit: subprime credit cards	£194	4	£9
Higher-cost credit: mail order catalogues	£178	6	£11
Higher-cost credit: Christmas hamper schemes	47	3	1

Using vignettes to examine preferences for paying for long-term social care in online and interview surveys

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Abstract

A novel approach using ‘vignettes’ to elicit public attitudes towards paying for long-term social care for older people was administered in two surveys: 1) for people aged 18-75, a web survey using an online volunteer panel; and 2) for older people aged 65+, a face-to-face interview was included within a national random location omnibus survey. Given the different sampling approaches and modes of data collection, we examined whether our key results differed between the two surveys by comparing responses for the 65-75 age group that was included in both. While responses to the vignettes were significantly different in the two surveys, after adjusting for differences in socio-demographic characteristics, the vignette results were comparable. The variations in response between the surveys thus appear to be due to differences in sample profile rather than to measurement differences due to survey mode.

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Introduction

Survey aims

Unlike the NHS in England, which is free at the point of delivery, social care is means-tested, and only people on lower incomes and with no or few capital assets receive funding from the state to cover some or all of the costs of meeting some or all their care needs. In addition, about half of those receiving formal social care in England privately financed at least part of their care costs (Charlesworth and Johnson, 2018). Cuts to public social care funding since 2009 (Phillips and Simpson, 2017), combined with growing demand for social care, have reinforced – indeed amplified – views among the public and policymakers that changes to social care funding systems are required.

Previous research into the public's views on social care funding has shown that:

- ▀ Public understanding of the current system is poor, with many adults believing that social care costs, like health care, are almost entirely funded by the state (Bottery et al, 2018; Ipsos MORI, 2018; Gregory, 2014; IPPR, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2011)
- ▀ Few adults save over the long-term in order to pay for social care costs, should the need arise (Ipsos MORI, 2016)
- ▀ Most adults in England do not think their housing assets should be used to fund social care (as they may be in the current system) (Overton and O'Mahony, 2017)
- ▀ Most people say they do not want to rely on informal (that is, unpaid) care from family members when they are older (Bottery et al, 2018; Ipsos MORI, 2018)

However, there is limited consensus among the public and policymakers on a number of key issues, including the balance between individual and state funding responsibilities; the level of income or assets above which individual service users should be expected to contribute to their own care costs; and whether there should be an upper limit on the costs that users should be required to pay. This last is important as lifetime care costs are £100,000+ for about 10% of adults (Commission on Funding of Care & Support, 2011). Research on future funding options is often hampered both by the lack of public understanding of how the current complex system works and by the implications of proposals for change in the tax and inheritance systems, as well as their distributional consequences (for example between different age groups and socio-economic groups) and the consequences for overall public expenditure.

Over the past few years, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) in England has been examining a range of policy options for reforming the current system of paying for social care. To inform the policy process, the DHSC commissioned the Policy Innovation & Evaluation Research Unit (PIRU) to carry out a survey among the general population to secure greater understanding of public attitudes to financing social care for older people. Our study took a novel approach and attempted to simplify the process of eliciting survey respondents' views by starting from a 'blank slate' (that is, disregarding the current means tests for income and assets) and asking them to focus on only three key personal parameters – income, savings and housing assets – when deciding whether the state, the service user, or a mixture of both, should pay for the social care costs of an older person. After a very brief description of the current system in England, respondents were shown four situations, or vignettes, describing the social care needs of an older person, and in each vignette, one of the parameters was varied while the other two remained the same. The vignettes are described more fully below. A key aim of the research was to look at the factors associated with differing attitudes to paying for care, such as age, partnership status, ethnicity, socio-economic position, health status and experience of informal caring.

Methodological issues

Given time and cost constraints, the research team decided to administer the vignettes using Kantar's online panel. The use of online panels to carry out surveys of the general population has increased significantly over the past 20 years, initially in the market and social research sectors, and more recently among academic researchers. Despite concerns over possible coverage, sampling and response bias (Zack et al, 2019; MacInnis et al, 2018; AAPOR, 2010; Erens et al, 2014; Nicolaas et al, 2014; Yaeger et al, 2011), the use of online surveys is likely to continue to increase because they allow relatively cheap and quick data collection, which contrasts with the rising costs of traditional face-to-face interview surveys at a time when response rates to such surveys are decreasing.

However, online surveys are not appropriate for all groups in the population, especially those without access to the internet, which includes many older people in the UK and other countries (AAPOR, 2010; Duffy et al, 2005; Hirsch et al, 2013; Bethlehem, 2010). Despite the inter-generational gap in internet usage narrowing in the past decade, older adults in the UK are still the least likely to use the internet. According to 2019 figures from ONS, 29% of adults aged 65 and older have never used the internet, down from 58% in 2011 (compared with only a six percentage-point reduction to 2% for those aged 16-64) (Office for National Statistics, 2019). Among adults aged 75+, over half (53%) were not recent (that is, in the last three months) internet users, compared with 17% of those aged 65-74 and only 1% of individuals aged 16-44. In particular, older women are least likely to use the internet: among adults aged 75+, 46% of men and 59% of women had not used the internet in the past three months. Given the poor coverage of older people in online surveys, we set an upper age limit for the online survey at 75 years. In order to obtain the views of the large group of older people who are not internet users, we adopted to carry out a separate survey of older people (65+) using face-to-face interviews. The interviews were administered as part of Kantar's continuous omnibus survey.

Having administered the vignettes in two surveys using different modes of data collection (online and face-to-face) and different sampling approaches, the question arises as to how comparable the results are from these surveys. Existing evidence shows that different survey modes may provide different answers, even when the questionnaire administered is identical, as was the case in our surveys (Burkill et al, 2016; Prah et al, 2015; Heerwegh and Loosveldt, 2008; Link and Mokdad, 2005). Also, there may be differences due to the different sampling approaches used by our two surveys, particularly given the considerable evidence showing that online panels made up of members who have volunteered (in contrast to online panels that have been recruited using probability sampling methods) do not necessarily provide good representation of the population in general, whether on socio-demographic characteristics (some of which can be controlled for in online surveys by the setting of quota controls), or on the variables of interest to the survey (MacInnis et al, 2018; Pennay et al, 2018; Schonlau and Couper, 2017; Sturgis et al, 2016; Erens et al, 2014; Yaeger et al, 2011; AAPOR, 2010; Chang and Krosnik, 2009). Previous studies have shown that, compared with the general population, online panel members over-represent those who are voters, white, active internet users, in better health, have a higher income and more education, among other characteristics (which may vary from country to country) (Couper, 2017; AAPOR, 2010; Callegaro et al, 2014; Pennay et al, 2018; Zack et al, 2019; Duffy et al, 2005).

This paper, therefore, aims to:

- ▶ Describe the study's methodology including the achieved sample sizes and representativeness of both the online and interview surveys, as well as provide details of the vignettes and the derivation of analysis variables
- ▶ Describe the differences in the results between the two surveys and explore whether these are due to differences in survey mode and/or sample characteristics

The second objective is achieved by examining vignette responses and socio-demographic characteristics for the 65-75 age group that was included in both the online and interview surveys.

Methods

Study design

In collaboration with Kantar, Public Division, we carried out two surveys of the general population in England. The first used the online panel run by the Kantar Profiles Division which numbers over 150,000 adults. Panel respondents are invited to take part in surveys by email and are incentivised with points which they can later trade for vouchers. The online survey aimed to achieve a sample of 3,000 individuals aged 18 to 75, split equally between men and women, and with quotas set for age in order to be representative of the population of England (18-24, 13%; 25-34, 19%; 35-44, 18%; 45-54, 20%; 55-64, 16%; 65-75, 14%). The online survey was administered from 6 to 19 December 2018.

Given the relatively high percentage of older adults who do not use the internet, we included the same questions on Kantar's continuous face-to-face interview omnibus survey as we felt that would provide a more robust sample than an online survey of an older group. The omnibus survey is carried out weekly among a cross-section of adults aged 16+ living in private households in the UK. Each survey covers a range of topics. The omnibus survey uses a random location sample design (a form of quota sampling). The sample frame consists of the postcode address file (PAF), from which clusters of a small set of homogenous streets are selected. Interviewers are given a list of addresses in these streets at which they must call, in order to restrict interviewer discretion in where they carry out interviews. Interviewers are also instructed to work during different days of the week and times of day when completing their assignments. Quotas (on region, gender, age, working status, and whether there are children in the household) are set for each interviewer assignment to help prevent natural variations in response propensity. Our module of questions on funding social care was completed by the 466 respondents aged 65+ years who were interviewed as part of the omnibus survey between 30 November and 4 December 2018.

Representativeness

Comparing the achieved samples with independent population data suggests that both the online (general population) and interview (older people) surveys provide reasonable representation of the target populations, at least for the socio-demographic variables for which reliable external data are available. Tables 1 and 2 show how the samples compare (although the comparisons may not be exact due to differences in the questions between the online and interview surveys and those used for the external comparisons). The online survey sample (Table 1) shows under-representation of young men (especially ages 18-34) and older women (ages 45-75), residents in London, non-white adults, adults who were married/cohabiting, adults who own their property with a mortgage, adults with no formal educational qualifications and adults in full-time work. By contrast, the groups who are over-represented in the online survey include older men (ages 45-64), younger women (especially ages 18-34), residents in northern England, white adults, adults who are not married/cohabiting, and adults who are unemployed. However, the differences between the online survey and external population data for these socio-demographic variables are generally quite small.

Table 1: Socio-demographic comparison of achieved online survey sample with independent population data

	Online survey achieved sample ³	Population data	Difference (survey – population)
	n=3000		
Gender¹	%	%	%
Men	50.0	49.6	0.4
Women	50.0	50.4	-0.4
Age within gender¹			
All			
18-24	13.0	12.0	1.0
25-34	19.0	19.1	-0.1
35-44	18.0	17.8	0.2
45-54	20.0	19.4	0.6
55-64	16.0	16.6	-0.6
65-75	14.0	15.0	-1.0
Men			
18-24	8.0	12.5	-4.5
25-34	15.3	19.4	-4.1
35-44	17.1	17.9	-0.8
45-54	22.6	19.3	3.3
55-64	22.6	16.4	6.2
65-75	14.3	14.6	-0.3
Women			
18-24	18.0	11.6	6.4
25-34	22.7	18.8	3.9
35-44	18.9	17.8	1.1

	Online survey achieved sample ³	Population data	Difference (survey – population)
45-54	17.4	19.5	-2.1
55-64	9.4	16.8	-7.4
65-75	13.7	15.5	-1.8
Region¹			
North East	5.6	4.8	0.8
North West	13.6	13.0	0.6
Yorkshire & Humberside	10.0	9.8	0.2
East Midlands	10.1	8.6	1.5
West Midlands	10.1	10.4	-0.3
East of England	10.9	10.9	0.0
London	13.0	16.2	-3.2
South East	16.0	16.2	-0.2
South West	10.7	10.0	0.7
Ethnic group²			
White	90.9	85.6	5.3
Mixed	2.2	1.2	1.0
Asian/Asian British	3.8	7.2	-3.4
Chinese	0.7	0.6	0.1
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	1.8	3.4	-1.6
Other	0.6	1.9	-1.3
Marital status²			
Married/civil partnership/cohabiting	60.8	64.9	-4.1
Single/separated/widowed/divorced	39.2	35.1	4.1
Tenure²			

	Online survey achieved sample ³	Population data	Difference (survey – population)
Own outright	34.1	29.6	4.5
Mortgage/loan	26.6	36.4	-9.8
Part rent	1.8	0.7	1.1
Rent	35.1	32.6	2.5
Other	2.3	0.8	1.5
Highest educational qualification²			
Degree or higher (or equivalent)	42.1	40.3	1.8
Other	53.0	51.6	1.4
No formal qualifications	4.9	8.1	-3.2
Employment status²			
Working full time	44.7	50.6	-5.9
Working part time	18.5	17.2	1.3
Unemployed	9.4	2.8	6.6
Inactive	27.4	29.5	-2.1

¹ Population data based on ONS mid-term population estimates for 2018 for ages 18-75.

² Population data based on Annual Population Survey (APS) 2018 for ages 18-75.

³ The survey data are unweighted.

Table 2 shows the same comparisons with population data for the achieved interview sample of older people aged 65+. The interview sample of older adults shows the following groups to be under-represented: women; men aged 75-84; women aged 85+; older adults who are married/cohabiting; older adults who are home owners; older adults with any educational qualifications; and older adults in work. By contrast, the groups who are over-represented include: men; women aged 75-84; older adults in the northern parts of England (aside from the North East); older adults who are not married/cohabiting; older adults who live in rented accommodation; those with no formal educational qualifications; and older adults who are inactive/retired. As for the online survey, the differences between our older adult sample and older adults in the general population are generally quite small.

Table 2: Socio-demographic comparison of achieved interview survey sample for older people aged 65+ with independent population data

	Interview survey achieved sample ³	Population data	Difference (survey – population)
	n=466		
Gender¹	%	%	%
Men	50.2	45.7	4.5
Women	49.8	54.3	-4.5
Age within gender¹			
All			
65-74	55.6	54.5	1.1
75-84	31.8	32.1	-0.3
85+	12.7	13.4	-0.7
Men			
65-74	59.4	57.5	1.9
75-84	27.4	31.8	-4.4
85+	13.2	10.7	2.5
Women			
65-74	51.7	52.0	-0.3
75-84	36.2	32.3	3.9
85+	12.1	15.7	-3.6
Region¹			
North East	2.8	5.1	-2.3
North West	16.1	13.3	2.8
Yorkshire & Humberside	11.8	10.0	1.8
East Midlands	11.2	9.1	2.1

	Interview survey achieved sample ³	Population data	Difference (survey – population)
West Midlands	9.7	10.7	-1.0
East of England	12.2	12.0	0.2
London	9.9	10.4	-0.5
South East	14.8	17.3	-2.5
South West	11.6	12.1	-0.5
Ethnic group²			
White	94.6	95.2	-0.6
Mixed	0.4	0.2	0.2
Asian/Asian British	2.4	2.5	-0.1
Chinese	0.2	0.2	0
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	2.2	1.3	0.9
Other	0.2	0.5	-0.3
Marital status²			
Married/civil partnership/cohabiting	55.2	62.9	-7.7
Single/separated/widowed/divorced	44.8	37.1	7.7
Tenure²			
Own outright	73.4	76.2	-2.8
Mortgage/loan	2.4	5.0	-2.6
Part rent	0.2	0.3	-0.1
Rent	24.0	17.4	6.6
Other	0.0	1.0	-1.0
Highest educational qualification²			
Degree or higher (or equivalent)	22.8	32.3	-9.5
Other	38.4	48.6	-10.2

	Interview survey achieved sample ³	Population data	Difference (survey – population)
No formal qualifications	38.7	19.1	19.6
Employment status²			
Working full time	1.7	3.4	-1.7
Working part time	4.3	6.9	-2.6
Unemployed	0.0	0.2	-0.2
Inactive/retired	94.0	89.5	4.5

¹ Population data based on ONS mid-term population estimates for 2018 for ages 65+.

² Population data based on Annual Population Survey (APS) 2018 for ages 65+.

³ The survey data are unweighted.

Survey questionnaire

The same questionnaire was used for both the online and interview surveys. For the latter, respondents were shown the tablet computer used by interviewers and asked to read the vignettes themselves. Thus, visual presentation of the vignettes and the response (including ‘don’t know’) categories was identical in both the online and interview surveys; for the face-to-face survey, however, the interviewer read the question and keyed in the respondent’s answer.

The questionnaire was developed by the research team following initial qualitative research involving eight focus groups which examined people’s perceptions and behaviours with respect to planning for future social care needs as well as their priorities for how social care provision should be funded (Dixon et al, 2019). The survey questionnaire began with a short introduction to social care in England, which provided very brief descriptions of what social care involves, who receives social care, and how it is paid for. This was then followed by four vignettes – two involving home care and two concerning care homes – which asked how respondents thought the care should be paid for (described in more detail below). There were also questions on whether respondents thought there should be a ‘ceiling’ on care costs within each vignette (asked only of those who said the user should pay some or all of the costs). At the end of the questionnaire, there were a few questions on general attitudes to public spending and concerns about the respondent needing care themselves when older, plus the usual socio-demographic questions. The questionnaire was further refined after cognitive testing of ten respondents by Kantar researchers.

Vignettes

Each respondent was asked how care should be paid for by presenting them with four different vignettes: two involved care provided in the person's own home (vignettes 1 and 2) and two involved the person moving to a care home (vignettes 3 and 4). Each vignette related to an older woman (Grace) or man (Alan), with gender randomly assigned to vignettes 1 and 2, with vignettes 3 and 4 being the opposite gender for that respondent: that is, when vignettes 1 and 2 were assigned to Grace, then vignettes 3 and 4 would relate to Alan, and vice versa. While gender was randomly assigned, the vignettes were always asked in the same order.

Each vignette showed three parameters for the individual's level of:

- ▶ Income
- ▶ Savings
- ▶ Housing assets

One parameter was varied in each vignette, and had three levels: for example, in vignette 1, savings was varied and could be £100,000, £20,000 or £5000. Respondents were then asked how care should be paid for, and given three options (plus 'don't know'):

- ▶ The state pays all
- ▶ The user pays all
- ▶ A mixture (the state pays some and the user pays some)

The wording for the four vignettes is shown in Box 1. For each vignette, the middle level of the varying parameter was asked first, and the response determined the next question asked: if the response was for the state to pay all the care costs, the respondent was filtered to the higher level of the parameter; if the response was for the user to pay some or all of the costs, the person was filtered to the lower level. The vignettes were laid out in a table, with the changed parameter highlighted on screen. An example of how the vignettes looked on screen is shown below for vignette 4:

Income	£200 per week
Living arrangement	Rents
Total savings	£30,000

Box 1: The four vignettes

Vignettes 1 and 2 relate to receiving care at home.

'Grace/Alan is 80 years old and lives on their own. They had a fall and now need help getting up, going to bed, washing and dressing. They want to stay in their own home and will continue to need this help for the rest of the time they live in their home. The cost of social care to allow them to stay in their own home is currently £220 per week (around £11,500 per year).'

Vignette 1

Income: £200 per week

Housing assets: owns home worth £150,000

Savings (varies): £100,000/£20,000/£5,000

Vignette 2

Income (varies): £500/£200/£165 per week

Housing assets: rents from council

Savings: £5,000

Vignettes 3 and 4 relate to moving into a care home

'Grace/Alan is 80 years old and lives alone. They have dementia and now need 24-hour care. They can no longer live at home and will need to move to a care home. The care home costs £750 per week, which is around £40,000 per year. These costs include all of their living costs.'

Vignette 3

Income: £200 per week

Housing assets: owns home worth £500,000/£150,000/rents

Savings: £20,000

Vignette 4

Income: £800/£200/£165 per week

Housing assets: rents

Savings: £30,000

The full questionnaire including the vignettes can be viewed on PIRU's website (<http://piru.lshtm.ac.uk/projects/current-projects/preferences-for-paying-for-long-term-care-for-older-people.html#t3>).

Analysis variables

A variable was derived for each vignette combining responses for the three levels, and consisted of seven categories:

Category	Description
State pays all (1)	State pays all costs at all levels of savings/income/assets; no user contributions
Mixture of state and user payments: At highest level (2)	User pays some or all costs at highest level of savings/income/assets
At middle level (3)	User pays some or all costs at middle level of savings/income/assets
At lowest level (4)	User pays some costs even at lowest level of savings/income/assets
User pays all (5)	User pays all costs even at lowest level of savings/income/assets
Don't know – part (6)	At least one level answered and one 'don't know'
Don't know – all (7)	All three levels 'don't know'

Ethics

The survey was approved by the LSHTM Observational Research Ethics Committee (Ref 16186).

Comparison of the 65-75 years age group in the online and interview surveys

In order to examine the differences that might arise between the two surveys as a consequence of their using different modes of data collection and sampling approaches, this section compares results between the online panel survey and the interview survey for respondents who were eligible to be included in both surveys, that is adults in the 65-75 age group. The overall sample sizes for this comparison are 420 for the online panel and 277 for the interview survey. Similar to Tables 1 and 2 but restricted to respondents aged 65-75, Table 3 compares the two samples on a number of socio-demographic variables with each other and with population data where independent external data are available for this age group. Survey respondents with missing data have been excluded from the base where these were few in number (which applied to most variables),² but the percentages of missing responses (whether not answered, refused or don't know) are shown for two socio-demographic variables where they are significant in number and of potential methodological interest.

¹ Most socio-demographic variables had no missing values; aside from the two variables where missings are shown in Table 3, the maximum number of missings was 6 (for the question on general health).

Table 3: Comparison of socio-demographic variables for respondents aged 65-75 in online survey with those in interview survey, and with independent population data (where available)

	Online survey ⁴	Interview survey ⁴	Population data
	n=420	n=277	
Gender¹	%	%	%
Male	51.2	54.2	48.1
Female	48.8	45.8	51.9
Marital status²			
Married/cohabiting	67.5	67.5	70.2
Single/separated/widowed/divorced	32.5	32.5	29.8
Tenure²			
Own outright	74.5	73.3	76.1
Own with mortgage	5.5	2.9	5.8
Shared ownership	1.0	0.4	0.3
Rent/rent free	19.1	23.5	17.7
Ethnicity²			
White	98.3	94.2	95.4
Non-white	1.7	5.8	4.6
Region¹			
North East	4.8	2.9	5.2
North West	12.9	18.1	13.5
Yorkshire & Humberside	9.8	13.0	10.1
East Midlands	11.0	11.2	9.3
West Midlands	9.5	8.7	10.6
East of England	10.5	11.2	11.9
London	6.0	10.1	10.3
South East	22.4	14.8	17.1

	Online survey ⁴	Interview survey ⁴	Population data
South West	13.3	10.1	12.0
Economic status²			
In work	16.0	9.0	14.4
Retired/other	84.0	91.0	85.6
Education level²			
Degree+	35.8	25.1	32.2
A level	17.9	12.7	19.6
GCSE	30.8	26.2	17.2
Other	1.0	3.7	11.5
None	14.6	32.2	19.4
Self-reported general health³			
Very good	9.8	19.0	23.0
Good	41.6	47.4	41.5
Fair	40.9	24.8	23.6
Bad	6.2	6.9	8.4
Very bad	1.2	1.8	3.5
Limiting long-standing illness²			
Has LLSI	30.3	27.2	36.8
No LLSI	69.7	72.8	63.2
Whether cares for someone³			
A carer	17.2	20.8	22.6
Not a carer	82.8	79.2	77.4
Whether being cared for			
Not cared for	89.0	87.7	NA
Cared for	11.0	12.3	

	Online survey ⁴	Interview survey ⁴	Population data
Social grade			
A	5.7	6.1	NA
B	35.0	18.8	
C1	30.5	19.5	
C2	13.6	21.7	
D	10.0	10.8	
E	5.2	23.1	
Value of home (for home owners)			
Home <150K	17.0	12.4	NA
150-299K	40.0	30.5	
300-499K	24.5	20.5	
500k	8.4	7.1	
1m+	0.9	1.0	
DK/refused	9.3	28.6	
Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile			
1	12.1	29.6	NA
2	8.3	15.9	
3	11.4	17.0	
4	14.0	10.8	
5	6.2	9.4	
Missing	47.9	17.3	

NA = not available.

¹ Population data based on ONS mid-term population estimates for 2018 for ages 65-75.

² Population data based on Annual Population Survey (APS) 2018 for ages 65-75.

³ Population data based on Health Survey for England 2017 for ages 65-74.

⁴ The survey data are unweighted.

Table 3 shows that the differences between the online and interview surveys are not large for several socio-demographic variables, including gender, marital status, whether respondents have a limiting long-standing illness, care for someone else and are being cared for. Compared with independent population data, the online survey distributions are closer than those from the interview survey for gender, tenure, economic status, education level, and whether respondents have a limiting long-standing illness. For ethnicity, self-assessed general health and whether respondents provide informal care for someone else, the interview survey distributions are closer to the external population data. For region, the picture is mixed with the online survey better representing older adults in the northern areas of England, while the interview survey is better for the east and southern areas (except for the South West).

There are three large differences between older adults in the two surveys:

- ▶ In terms of social grade, online respondents are of higher social grade, with 71.2% classed as ABC1 compared with just 44.4% in the interview survey
- ▶ In terms of education, online respondents are much more likely to have a degree, A level or GCSE (84.5% compared with 64.0% in the interview survey), while interview respondents are more than twice as likely to have no formal qualifications (32.2% compared with 14.6% in the online survey)
- ▶ Interview respondents were more likely to describe their health as very good/good than were those in the online survey (66.4% and 51.4% respectively)

There were also large differences with respect to missing data for two variables:

- ▶ Interview respondents who were home owners were much more likely not to provide an estimate of the value of their home (28.6% compared with 9.3% for online respondents)
- ▶ IMD was much more likely to be missing for online than for interview survey respondents (47.9% and 17.3% respectively), which indicates that reliable postcodes were not available for nearly half of online respondents in this age group

Table 4 compares online and interview survey responses among the 65-75 age group for the four vignettes. The columns on the left side – columns a) and b) – show the raw (unweighted) distributions for each survey. There are some notable differences between responses given by respondents in the online survey and those in the interview survey:

- ▶ The distributions for all four vignettes were significantly different between the online and interview surveys (column c)
- ▶ Interview respondents were more likely to say the state should pay all
- ▶ Online respondents were more likely to say the user should pay all or pay at the lowest level
- ▶ The proportions of 'don't know' answers were significantly different for all four vignettes, with interview respondents being much more likely to say they 'don't know' (column c)

Looking at the raw figures, therefore, it appears that the different survey designs lead to quite different results among this older age group. In order to further explore whether these differences are largely explained by divergences due to sample profile or to data-collection mode, we used propensity score matching (Leuven and Sianesi, 2003) to analyse the differences in responses to the vignettes between the online and interview surveys. Propensity score matching is useful when participants' characteristics may be associated with both the likelihood of participating in the study (for example, of completing the online survey) and the study outcomes (for example, preferences for how the social care should be paid for). Propensity scoring creates pairs of individuals matched on their background (and potentially other) characteristics, in this case, pairs of similar respondents in the online and interview surveys. The outcomes in the matched group using propensity score weights can be compared with those of the unmatched samples to detect

the role of sample characteristics in shaping survey responses (columns c and f in Table 4). We matched on variables for socio-economic position (SEP), namely educational level and social grade, along with gender and self-reported general health (background characteristics that differed between the online and interview surveys, as shown in Table 3). All covariates were treated as categorical. The outcomes were the responses to the four vignettes, so that the first five categories, 'state pays all' to 'user pays all', were analysed with ordinal regression, and the 'don't know' category was separately analysed using logistic regression.³

The weighted distributions for the online and interview surveys are shown in Table 4 in columns d) and e). The results of the propensity weighting show:

- ▶ After weighting by gender, SEP and general health, the differences between the online and interview surveys were no longer statistically significant for the four vignettes (column f)
- ▶ The differences in the proportion of respondents responding 'don't know' to the vignettes were eliminated by the propensity weighting for vignette 1 only, but were still statistically significant for the other three vignettes (column f)

³ For the propensity score models, we used 1-to-5 matching with a calliper of 0.03 (that is, the propensity score distance which indicates how far the matched pairs are allowed to be from each other; 1-to-5 matching allows each interview case to have up to five matches in the online sample if they are within the distance of 0.03). The value 0.03 was selected because it was approximately 20% of the standard deviation of the logit of the propensity score, as has been previously recommended (Austin, 2011). We carried out sensitivity analyses to compare this approach with 1-to-1 matching without a calliper, 1-to-1 matching with a calliper of 0.03, and 1-to-1 matching with a calliper of 0.03 with no replacement (that is, each case in the online sample can only be used once). In these models, the numbers of matched cases in the online sample were small and the bias on the covariates was larger than using 1-to-5 matching.

Table 4: Comparison of vignette responses for respondents aged 65-75 in the online and interview surveys, unweighted (columns a, b, c), and weighted using propensity score matching for gender, SEP and general health (columns d, e, f) using propensity weights

	Unweighted			Weighted: gender, SEP, general health		
	a) Online survey	b) Interview survey	c) Difference a vs b1	d) Online survey	e) Interview survey	f) Difference d vs e2
Vignette 1						
N	391	219	610	214	213	427
State pays all	15.1	27.4	-0.51**	20.6	25.9	-0.30
Highest level	15.4	18.3		14.4	16.1	
Middle level	29.7	22.8		27.5	27.1	
Lowest level	27.9	20.1		22.8	19.5	
User pays all	12.0	11.4		14.8	11.4	
N	420	259	679	249	247	496
Don't know	6.9	15.4	0.90***	8.6	13.2	0.50
Vignette 2						
N	393	206	599	230	197	427
State pays all	21.4	32.5	-0.29*	29.7	31.0	-0.06
Highest level	38.9	30.1		32.1	32.2	
Middle level	20.6	19.4		18.7	18.2	
Lowest level	13.5	14.1		15.0	14.3	
User pays all	5.6	3.9		4.5	4.2	
N	420	259	679	249	247	496
Don't know	6.4	20.5	1.32***	5.4	18.5	1.39***
Vignette 3						
N	386	204	590	231	200	431

	Unweighted			Weighted: gender, SEP, general health		
	a) Online survey	b) Interview survey	c) Difference a vs b1	d) Online survey	e) Interview survey	f) Difference d vs e2
State pays all	17.6	25.5	-0.35*	20.8	23.4	-0.15
Highest level	8.0	9.3		10.2	10.9	
Middle level	24.9	22.1		24.5	24.9	
Lowest level	42.5	38.7		38.4	35.5	
User pays all	7.0	4.4		6.1	5.3	
<i>N</i>	420	259	678	249	247	496
Don't know	8.1	21.1	1.15***	8.4	18.4	0.94**
Vignette 4						
<i>N</i>	388	190	578	217	187	399
State pays all	16.5	26.3	-0.43*	18.8	25.6	-0.40
Highest level	10.1	12.6		10.1	12.1	
Middle level	17.8	14.2		16.2	17.3	
Lowest level	43.0	36.8		42.4	36.4	
User pays all	12.6	10.0		12.4	8.7	
<i>N</i>	420	259	679	249	247	496
Don't know	7.6	26.6	1.48***	9.0	23.9	1.20***

Note. All propensity score models used 1-to-5 matching with a calliper of 0.03.

¹ Unadjusted differences for the categories 'state pays all' to 'user pays all' using ordinal logistic regression, differences for the category 'Don't know' using logistic regression.

² Differences for the categories 'state pays all' to 'user pays all' using ordinal regression, differences for the category 'Don't know' using logistic regression, and all adjusted for gender, social grade, educational level and self-reported general health.

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05.

Discussion

Our study examined public attitudes to financing long-term care for older people. We developed a novel approach to collecting these data – showing respondents a sequence of vignettes with varied levels of income, savings or housing assets – and asking whether care costs should be paid by the state, the user or a mixture of both.

We carried out two surveys. The first used a volunteer online panel among adults aged 18-75; the upper age limit was imposed because of existing evidence on the poor coverage of older people in online surveys. In order to include all older people in our study, we administered the same questionnaire using face-to-face interviews among a nationally representative quota sample of respondents aged 65 and over.

In order to examine the extent to which results from our two surveys might differ as a consequence of their different modes of data collection and sampling approaches, for the age group that was included in both the online and interview surveys (that is, adults aged 65-75), we compared their socio-demographic characteristics and their responses on the key measures of interest (that is, whether the state or the user should pay for social care given an individual's particular circumstances).

We showed that, while some socio-demographic characteristics for respondents aged 65-75 were similar between the online and interview surveys (for example marital status, tenure, long-standing illness), there were very large differences in social grade and level of education, with online respondents much more likely than interview respondents to be of higher social grade and to have higher levels of educational qualifications, findings which are consistent with other research comparing online and interview surveys for the population in general (Couper, 2017; Callegaro et al, 2014; AAPOR, 2010).

Turning to a comparison of the results on key measures, we showed that all four vignettes gave significantly different results in the online and interview surveys for this older age group. We used propensity score matching to examine whether controlling for differences in background characteristics between the online and interview surveys might reduce the differences found in the vignette results. After adjusting for gender, SEP (that is, social grade and education) and self-reported general health, the differences in the distributions for all four vignettes between the online and interview surveys were no longer statistically significant, suggesting that these (sample) characteristics were a more significant factor in explaining the differing results than was survey mode. Of course, an important limitation of our study is that we only looked at the 65-75 age group, and we cannot say if these findings would apply to adults outside this narrow age range.

Contrary to findings from previous studies which show that respondents using a self-completion format are more likely to use neutral points (such as 'don't know' or 'neither agree nor disagree') than those taking part in an interview (Chang and Krosnick, 2010; Heerwegh and Loosveldt, 2008; Duffy et al, 2005; AAPOR, 2010), we found the opposite, with interview respondents much more likely to give 'don't know' responses to the vignettes. Previous studies have shown that individuals in lower social grades and with low levels of education (characteristics which were much more likely among interview respondents) are more likely to 'satisfice', that is, select response options which require the least cognitive effort, such as 'don't know' (Roberts, 2010; Krosnick, 2000). In our study, while the differences in 'don't know' responses between the surveys were reduced, they still remained significant (for all but one vignette) after adjusting for social grade and level of education (with the possibility that there may be further (unobserved) sample differences between the two surveys related to the use of 'don't know').

In conclusion, we have shown, firstly, that a novel approach to investigating the complex topic of the public's attitudes to funding long-term social care can be successfully carried out using an online survey.

Secondly, our findings suggest that concerns over data quality in online surveys may be misplaced, at least for surveys of older people, as our online survey achieved ‘better’ data quality (that is, fewer ‘don’t know’ responses) than the equivalent interview survey. It could be that older adults who volunteer for online panels are more likely to complete the questionnaire diligently than younger panel members who may be more prone, for example, to speed through online questionnaires (Greszki et al, 2014). This interpretation is supported by data from our online survey which showed that median completion time increased with age from 7.6 minutes for the 18-24 age group to 10.2 minutes for those aged 65-74. Moreover, the topic of our study may have been of particular interest to older adults, encouraging higher quality responses.

Lastly, our study sheds light on earlier predictions (Nicolaas et al, 2014) that, as the computer-literate population ages, it will become increasingly feasible to extend the use of online surveys to include older age groups. Online surveys among volunteer panels are often the only affordable option for large surveys in academic and social research, although concerns have been raised over the quality and representativeness of online panel surveys. Despite lower levels of internet use, our comparison showed that older people joining volunteer online panels appear to be subject to similar biases to those found among younger panel members (they are more highly educated than people who do not join online panels) and that such biases are likely to be reflected in the survey estimates. As AAPOR (2010) points out, however, while online panel surveys should not be relied on to provide precise population estimates, they can be useful in other settings, such as when looking at how socio-demographic characteristics relate with other survey variables.

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Handmade object elicitation: using handmade objects to prompt richer interview data

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Abstract

As part of a qualitative study of UK dads' groups, fathers and children were invited to bring objects they had made at the dads' group to semi-structured interviews. Within social science research, the objects that have been used as elicitation stimuli in interviews to date have been dominated by manufactured/ shop-bought items. This article considers the benefits and potential of using objects created by participants – termed 'handmade object elicitation' (HOE) – as an inclusive and creative research method. HOE, it is argued, engages and sustains children and adults in the interview process; addresses some of the limitations of elicitation methods; generates rich conversations; and unearths valuable insights. Furthermore, handmade objects differ from elicitation practices which utilise manufactured and shop-bought items because the handmade objects are embodied within the making process and, therefore, potentially are more bound to the memory-making and meaning-making processes. As such, HOE has considerable potential as a valuable qualitative research method.

Introduction

Background

My PhD investigates four community-based dads' groups in southern England where father-figures and the children attend to take part in playful activities. Overall this study includes observations and 51 interviews: with dads' group leaders (n=12); mothers (n=7); children (n=8); and fathers (n=24). This article focuses on a novel elicitation method utilised in seven semi-structured interviews undertaken with fathers and their children together. At these, participants were invited to bring objects they had previously made at the dads' group to the interview. Within the social sciences, although a wide range of prompts have been used in data-collection processes, these have been dominated by manufactured/ shop-bought items (or material). This article considers the benefits and potential of using objects created by participants as an inclusive and creative elicitation research method.

Study methodology

The semi-structured interview is a well-attested qualitative method for gathering participants' detailed perceptions, attitudes and opinions on a particular subject in order for the researcher to better understand the lived world from the subjects' point of view (Kvale, 2008). It is acknowledged that children's voices should be heard so that hidden aspects of their everyday worlds can be foregrounded, and also from a social justice perspective (Christensen, 2004; Goodliff, 2017; James, 2007; Prout, 2002). It has

been noted that ‘detailed qualitative approaches that consider the views and opinions of young people (alongside those of parents)’ are required, and ‘adult voices need to be complemented ... by in-depth research with children themselves ... across all areas of research into fathers and families’ (Jeanes, 2010, p.207). Jeanes also invites researchers to ‘consider carefully how to develop appropriate methods to ensure young people are able to express their views and opinions in ways they are comfortable with’ (Jeanes, 2010, p.213).

While it has been known for two decades in fatherhood studies that interviews develop ‘a rich understanding of cultural context and interpersonal processes associated with ... how fathers are directly or indirectly involved in their children’s lives’ (Marsiglio et al, 2000, p.1179), there still remain few studies that investigate the views of young children and their fathers (Chawla-Duggan and Milner, 2016; Milner and Chawla-Duggan, 2018).

In order to include children’s voices and to engage fathers in conversation, I devised and utilised a Handmade Object Elicitation (HOE) method during seven father-child interviews⁴ (with eight children in total). I chose to use paired interviews – fathers with their children – as I wanted to experience the co-narration process and observe the domestic father-child dynamic without the mother present, and also because having a child present can weaken traditional stoic masculine boundaries ‘where conversations can start’ (Chawla-Duggan and Milner, 2016, p.473). Four fathers were aged 35-44; three were aged 45-54. All were co-resident with the child’s mother. The eight children (four girls) were aged between four and ten years. Interviews took place at the participants’ homes.

Object elicitation

Object elicitation methods with children

In education and family studies a number of innovative object-, activity- or image-based methods have been developed and deployed to engage children and include their voices in the research process (Barker and Weller, 2003; Clark and Moss, 2011; Goodliff, 2017). These participatory, playful approaches use toys, puppets, dressing-up, map-making, children’s guided tours, drawings and visual materials (for example picture books, digital cameras and photographs) as part of the process of exploring children’s views and experiences (Goodliff, 2017; Kara 2015). These elicitation aids are imaginative and creative; serve to help the participants describe, reflect on and analyse their experiences; and ‘give voice’ in inclusive and child-friendly ways.

Elicitation methods are especially important in the context of interviews with young children ‘who may have difficulty retrieving information from memory and recounting it in an interview ... [because they] generally rely to a greater extent on external cues for event recall than older children’ (Aschermann et al, 1998, p.56). In addition, objects of personal significance work well with children for whom a research interview will be an unfamiliar experience: objects allow them to talk but to talk through the object, toy or creative activity. Also, children are often more comfortable than adults talking about/through objects as they tend to have closer relationships and effortless interactions with the non-human (Rautio, 2014).

Elicitation methods with adults

As someone who worked in museum education for many years, I am aware that cultural probes and physical stimuli are valuable participatory tools in interviews with adults (Akama et al, 2007; Gaver et al, 1999). As DeLeon and Cohen (2005) say ‘probes and prompts are integral to successful interviews. Probes help motivate informants, facilitate the flow of an interview, and elicit information, but not necessarily in the form of a question’ (p.200). Objects (and creative activities with objects) in interview and community engagement settings can, therefore, act as triggers to break the ice; to jog the memory; and to encourage reflection, feedback and dialogue (Akama et al, 2007; DeLeon and Cohen, 2005).

⁴ This is the first time, I believe, that the use of objects made by participants as an elicitation method in data collection has been employed in fatherhood studies.

Object elicitation is also useful when covering sensitive topics ‘when the aim of the research is to facilitate research participants’ communication about aspects of their experience that may be difficult to tap into through conversation alone’ (Willig, 2017, p.211).

The objectivity and subjectivity of objects

Objects, however, are ‘not static, immutable, and determinable once and for all’ (Strati, 2006, p.23). Rather, ‘they are rich and complex’ (Mills and Hoerber, 2013, p.484). Mills and Hoerber (2013) propose a three-way framework for researching objects: firstly ‘instrumentality’ refers to the way an object contributes to or hampers its use or function; secondly ‘aesthetics’ refers to ‘the sensory experience an artifact elicits’; and thirdly ‘symbolism’ includes the meanings associated with an object. The latter emphasises how the physical properties of the object itself are seldom important: ‘the goal is not to learn about the object or place but instead to learn about the informant through the object or place’ (DeLeon and Cohen, 2005, p.200). It should also be noted that the instrumental, aesthetic and symbolic ascriptions are likely to vary with each person (Mills and Hoerber, 2013, p.484), and also that the relationships between people and objects are not fixed, but rather emerge and evolve over time (Barad, 2003).

Summary of the object elicitation interview method

In summary, the use of a range of objects and materials (and creative activities with objects) in interviews is an established and valuable tool. Object elicitation prompts research participants of all ages and life-stages to share the quality and texture of their life-world experiences more ‘than if they were asked to talk about it unaided’ (Willig, 2017, p.211). Object elicitation thus helps make ‘tangible that which is otherwise intangible’ (Cleeve et al, 2018, p.747). Furthermore, bringing meaningful, personal objects to the interview offers participants an active role in the research dynamic, and in the focus and structure of the interviews, because their choice of object (for example the material it is made of, its ‘instrumentality’, its aesthetic qualities, its origins and history, its personal significance/symbolism and so on) will determine what and how participants’ experiences are talked about. This is particularly important in the context of listening to children’s voices, or to those with long-term illness, non-native speakers and other marginalised communities (Brown, 2019; Dalton, 2019; Fullana et al, 2014; Vacchelli, 2017).

The use of handmade objects as an elicitation tool in semi-structured interviews with fathers and children

Handmade object elicitation

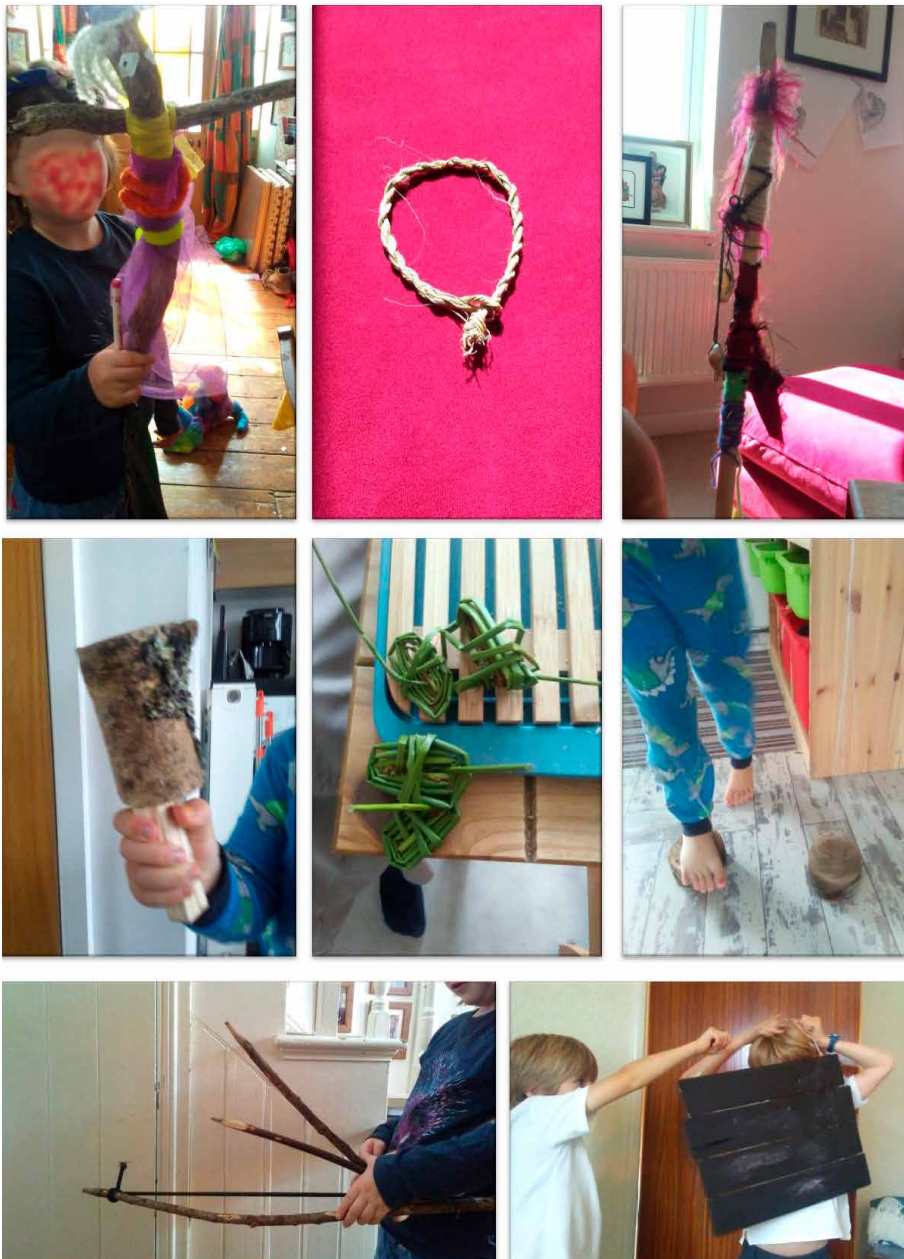
Object elicitation techniques have to date almost exclusively employed manufactured or shop-bought objects (or material) in the interview process. These have included soft toys, plastic toys, LEGO®, glass beads, family photographs, books, items of clothing, string, sand, clay, collage, personal possessions, domestic objects, web-based collections and many more (Akama et al, 2007; Barrett and Smigiel, 2007; Brown, 2019; Cleeve et al, 2018; Culshaw, 2019; Doel, 2018; Goodliff, 2017; Iltanen and Topo, 2015; Kara 2015; Vacchelli, 2017; Willig, 2016). In contrast, I elected to use objects created at the dads’ group by the children (or by the father and child together) – in my examples these were almost all made from natural materials (see Figure 1). To contrast with the manufactured, I have called this HOE.

For my research into dads’ groups, I initially selected the HOE method in order to engage and sustain the interest of both children and their dads in the interview process (because they had experienced the making of the objects). I also thought that HOE would be a useful strategy in addressing potential power imbalances between the adult father and their child (because the child would have agency and be encouraged to talk unhindered). However, from the outset it became apparent to me that objects made by the participants occasioned important insights during the interview process because of the making process.

The invitation to participate

In advance of the interview I invited fathers and children, using an information sheet and email, to select objects that were made at the dads' group – something the child had made, or the child and their father had made together. The information asked fathers to discuss the selection with their child and to jointly select a suitable object. I did not give any specifications as to the type, size, materials or age of the object to be selected (only that it needed to have been made at the dads' group). At a suitable point in the interview, fathers and children were asked to reveal their chosen object. I asked the child initially to explain the provenance of their item and its meaning to them, thus inviting personal recollections and interpretations. After an initial conversation with the child, the father was also invited to reflect on the object. This led to extensive father-child conversations and provided me with deeper insights into individual and joint perspectives (Barrett and Smigiel, 2007; Willig, 2017).

Figure 1: Objects made at the dads' group presented at the interviews with fathers and their children.



The objects as stimuli in the interviews

The objects presented were (Figure 1: top left) a wooden stick-person; a bracelet made of natural cordage; a decorated walking stick; (middle left) a wooden mallet; some reed boats; wooden stilts; (bottom left) a hazel-wood bow and arrow set; a blackboard made from recycled wood (the groups that these father-child dyads attend focus on forest school-type activities which is why objects made of natural materials dominate). Each child knew where their object was, such as a cupboard or under the bed; they spoke of playing with it regularly; keeping it safe from siblings; and of holding on to the object for the long-term (as Cleo said: 'making something to keep forever').

Here is an extract from my interview with Daisy (age 8) who made the bow and arrow (Figure 1: bottom left) and her father Nathan:

- Ian: Can you remember some of the activities you did?
- Daisy: I did archery.
- Nathan: Do you want to find your bow and arrow, the one you made?
-
- Ian: Wow, so you've made that? [touching arrow heads] They look sharp!
- Daisy: This one's the sharpest.
- Nathan: Can you tell us what it is first of all. Explain to the machine [recording device] what it is. What you are holding in your hands?
- Daisy: It's a bow and arrow.
- Nathan: That you...?
- Daisy: That I made in the woods.
- Nathan: That's right, at [dads' group] wasn't it?
- Daisy: Yeah.
- Ian: Fantastic.
- Daisy: Erm, one of the arrows has lost its other end.
- Nathan: Hmm that's not a problem but you sharpened it with a knife, didn't you?
- Daisy: Yeah, I sharpened it.
- Nathan: You sharpened the points.
- Daisy: Yeah, and then I tested it out and then it became my favourite toy and then I lost interest in it and then...
- Nathan: You play, you still play with it now sometimes.
- Ian: You've still got it. You've kept it though.
- Nathan: Exactly.
- Daisy: And it's, it's like...
- Nathan: And we had a cardboard box that you stabbed about a thousand times with these, didn't you?
- Daisy: Yeah! [Ian and Nathan laugh].

Nathan: I was only slightly concerned.

Daisy: Yeah and we, and you know the targets? That was...

Nathan: We made targets, didn't we? I'd forgotten about that. We made targets, didn't we?...
Oh and the other thing we were going to show you was the, where did we put the iPad?
There it is...

Interview extract with Nathan and Daisy

The conversation then leads on to Nathan and Daisy showing me photographs from the dads' group events and recalling other father-daughter activities. This extract illustrates how HOE was a valuable technique as it prompted spontaneous, unrehearsed reflections and unlocked tacit memories. In all seven interviews the introduction of the handmade object not only led to an animated and lengthy dialogue, but also then led to the revelation of other memories and personal stories, with further objects and photographs being presented, all of which added a richness to the interview schedule.

In another interview with John and Cleo (age 9), the handmade objects influenced the interplay between father and child as both participants recounted shared but also alternative memories prompted by their object.

Cleo: It's my stick, with a handle.

Ian: Yeah. Can you come a little bit closer to the mike just so you can describe it? What is it?

Cleo: So, it's a stick and it says 'Cleo' somewhere, there.

Ian: Oh actually carved into it?

Cleo: Yeah. And we've shaved the bottom bit. And we've put, erm, glowstick, a glowstick on it and decorated it with a, er, oak...

John: Conker.

Cleo: A conker... and some leather as a holder so you go like that [shakes stick]. So it digs into the mud and it helps you walk...

Ian: Is it special?

Cleo: Yeah, yeah, very special.

Ian: Why's it special?

Cleo: Erm, because it's special mud.

Ian: [laughs] Yeah?

Cleo: it's magic mud.

Ian: Ah, is it the mud you slipped on?

Cleo: [laughs] Yeah!

John: Is it because it reminds you of good times?

Cleo: Yeah

John: Yeah that's why I keep mine.

Ian: Yeah. So did you make that together?

Cleo: Erm, mostly dad made it.

Ian: [laughs] OK. I bet you did a bit.

- Cleo: I just popped this on.
- John: I think you did a bit, a bit of the whittling with a knife I seem to remember.
- Cleo: Yeah, I did a bit of the, I did that bit [pointing], the end bit but dad did the 'Cleo' and the...
- John: String and the conker.
- Cleo: Yeah and the leather.

Interview extract with John and Cleo

This extract demonstrates well how the made objects prompted light-hearted disagreement as to who had contributed which element of the made object. This gave me an insight into the father-child dynamic as well as the making processes, such as whittling, carving, binding, cutting, sawing, weaving, drilling, painting and other creative skills. This conversation led me to further questions, including the parents' attitudes to risk (for example a young child's use of tools), outdoor play and nature connection. Without the handcrafted object, it is possible that these important areas of my study of community dads' groups may not have been revealed to such a depth.

Like Cleo's 'magic mud', it is noteworthy that objects have symbolic importance for the adults as well as the children:

'I'm really rubbish at throwing things away that she's made and I, because it's, I, so I've got a box in there, and almost everything she, she draws or colours in or writes I put in a box and just kind of keep hold of. Alison's dreadful, she's like: [nagging tone] "Why are you keeping all that? It's only a mess of colouring" but I, I like to keep everything she's made, you know, because there will be a point when she's moved out or whatever, or she's at uni or working somewhere else, or whatever, and I'll be, it'll be really nice to kind of go back and, you know, occasionally, sort of look and say: "Oh do you remember when she did this?"'

Nathan

On two occasions, although the father had been invited in advance to source an object, this had been forgotten or an object could not be readily found. Interestingly, when an object was not to hand, this nonetheless still generated a lot of valuable discussion stemming from the unseen object and led both father and child to recount memorable time spent together in some detail. Below is an example extract from an interview with Guy and Reuben (age 7) to illustrate this point:

- Ian: I'm just wondering, did you bring anything? Something from [dads' group] an object maybe...?
- Guy: I meant to, er... [to Reuben] to talk to you... I thought about it earlier. Are you going to find something? [Reuben leaves]. The object I've been the most impressed with is, er, when we did, we did some plant bashing... on cotton with, erm...
- Reuben [returns]: I don't know where it is. It's the little bird we made for mum. It was Mother's Day and...
- Guy: No?... a little bird we've made? Out of what?
- Reuben: Yeah, out of leather.
- Guy: Ah yes we did cut out, some, yeah.
- Reuben: And then we made....

Guy: Ah she might have it somewhere special. Yeah, yep, you're right. We were doing presents... But we've got an amazing piece of fabric with, er, a nettle [slaps hands together] bashed on it and that's, I've got a very, very nice picture of Reuben wearing it like an Indian. I don't think I've got it here. But, erm, yeah, that's beautiful, erm. I never realised it was possible and you just, you know, that it's a very simple, beautiful thing to do and to share as well, and, and I would be very proud to actually be surrounded by children or even adults and go: "Look!" and, and show them and actually share... hmm.'

Interview extract with Guy and Reuben

This extract, like the others, reveals a number of interesting aspects. In terms of my research, the comment about dad being delighted to show and share the handmade leaf-print publicly, and in particular about being surrounded by '*even adults*' [my italics], suggests the father would not normally share domestic craftwork freely. However, in this instance, he would overcome his usual (masculine) reticence and speak proudly about their joint creation in the presence of others. Even though the leaf-print and leather bird were not found during the interview, the memory of their co-creation and veiled presence nonetheless added depth and richness to the conversation, revealing valuable insights that would not necessarily have been otherwise heard.

Object elicitation limitations

There are several limitations surrounding object elicitation methods that researchers have brought to our attention. Salmon (2001), a child psychologist who investigated the value of toys, drawings and photographs in interviews with children, alerts us to how practical aspects, in particular the age of the child, the delay between the event and the interview, and the way the object is presented during the interview, impact on the process (Salmon, 2001). Furthermore Willig (2016) cautions that 'the focus on objects can result in the imposition of an object-led structure on the interviews and a consequent failure to follow up on aspects of participants' accounts that transcend their relationship with the objects they brought' (Willig, 2016, p.211). Willig is here arguing that the objective nature of the object may provide a way to avoid expressing the personal and emotional; that is to say participants may focus on the materiality or instrumentality of the object in order to avoid revealing inner thoughts or feelings (Willig, 2016).

A further consideration is that, as object elicitation aims to 'break the frame' of reality (Harper, 2002) and reveal new insights, this has ethical implications in terms of what might be revealed. For instance, in any joint/collective interview situation, difficulties may arise as power can be unevenly distributed (Caldwell, 2013) with 'one respondent dominating the other, there is an underlying risk of provoking friction and disagreement between the interviewees' (Arksey, 1996, no page). There are potentially other power dynamics in interviews with young children, for example adults may be keen to select objects that portray their family in a positive way (so the child has little agency in the decision), and the child's voice may be silenced or undermined by the adult if the child's words are deemed to be unsuitable, irrelevant, embarrassing or 'childish'. Finally, in the context of my research, men may select an object they have made, such as a bird-box, that presents their DIY skills and thus their 'respectable masculine self' (Schwalbe and Wolkmir, 2001, p.56), rather than it being a collaborative or child-led selection process.

Within the limitations of my study, I would argue that handmade objects can overcome many of these concerns with object elicitation. For instance, young children (the youngest was aged four) and fathers became far more animated and engaged in the interview. Some of the objects had been made 12 months previously yet the time gap did not seem to have impacted on their recollection skills. While the object gave structure to the father-child interview, this was not imposed, and soon both adult and child participants transcended their relationships with the interview prop and willingly communicated other personal experiences, memories and familial insights. Young participants had agency as they selected objects that had meaning, and this allowed them more control of the flow and content of the

semi-structured interview. The objects focused and motivated participants (they appeared to enjoy the interview), and even when these objects prompted conflicting meanings and memories, the discussions were good-humoured. The storying around the made objects alerted the father to characteristics of their child that they had not been aware of previously or the important symbolic relationship the child maintained with their object. Moreover, the co-created nature of the objects, far from fostering an avoidance of personal issues or emotions, were important revelatory triggers that encouraged animated dialogue and relevant lateral stories, all of which allowed me a deeper insight into the father-child/family dynamic. This is a limited, non-comparative study, so it is not possible to say whether HOE has advantages over shop-bought or manufactured objects, however HOE, I contend, addresses some of the key concerns with object elicitation techniques and illuminates the emic rather than the etic so it has advantages that may well serve other qualitative social researchers.

Concluding remarks

While accepting that manufactured items, such as a soft toy or family photograph, clearly have personal significance to humans and are useful elicitation tools in qualitative research, handmade objects are underused prompts in the semi-structured interview setting. The HOE method is, I believe, an effective and appropriate tool for researchers as it surfaces and illuminates, through reflection, communication and interaction, tacit aspects of the lived experiences of the participants (Akama et al, 2007).

The addition of an object that the child has made, or the adult and child have made together, benefits the conversational dynamic by prompting discussion around similar and different memories. In addition, by generating richer storying of experiences, this method is inclusive and fun, and unlocks implicit and symbolic meanings, all of which amplify the quality of the data. HOE encourages rich autobiographical elaboration in interview participants that may differ from object elicitation practices which utilise manufactured and shop-bought items because the handmade objects are embodied with the making process and, therefore, are more bound to the memory-making and meaning-making processes. As such, HOE has significant potential as a valuable qualitative research tool.

To conclude, I would invite HOE to be included in the portfolio of data-collection methods as it offers a simple, creative, inclusive and edifying approach to qualitative research methods in family studies and potentially more widely. My study was limited to seven father-child interviews and I would, consequently, encourage qualitative researchers who are seeking creative participatory tools to adopt and adapt the HOE method in more diverse settings, and to explore whether the handmade has advantages over the manufactured.

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Co-producing research with people who have experienced severe and multiple disadvantages

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Abstract

The non-profit sector is increasingly utilising co-productive approaches to research and project work. With a focus on co-producing research with people who have experienced multiple and severe disadvantages, this research note shares learning from the sector about applying this approach in practice. Discussion includes defining levels of involvement; reflecting on assumptions about people with lived experiences; creating equal weight and value to contributions; defining success; and creating opportunities for contributors to co-productive processes to learn and reflect.

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Introduction

Co-production means working on an equal basis with people who have relevant experience of the topic being researched. It applies to all stages of the process, from design to sharing findings. Working in this way is becoming increasingly called upon as a research approach in the non-profit sector. It is an approach which is central to my current and previous work as a social researcher.

At its best, co-productive research is work which is fully understood and trusted by communities, resulting in a greater number of participants engaging meaningfully with work and connecting strongly with its outcomes. Co-produced research is also uniquely grounded in the impact and purpose of the finished product. Although aspiring to this process brings clear benefits, there is also learning to be shared about how to effectively support the process and what to expect from taking research in this direction.

My own learning about co-production was advanced when I joined a project with a focus on people who are experiencing severe and multiple disadvantages. Fulfilling Lives South East aims to improve support systems for this group, with a core aim of co-producing all evaluation and research. It is part of a wider national research project. Due to the focus of the work, people involved in planning and implementing research have experienced different combinations of offending, mental health issues, substance misuse, homelessness and domestic abuse. Although this group could be seen as particularly challenging to co-produce with, the benefits and challenges faced were commonly very similar to working with any other community group.

Most research projects aren't fully co-productive, and that's okay

Conducting research which can be defined as fully co-productive is not always possible in practice. Sometimes an external partner or funder provides parameters which cannot be altered, confidentiality issues limit involvement, or people with lived experiences would just prefer to be involved in some stages of research and not others.

It's best to focus on maximising co-productive processes where they are possible, rather than focusing on whether a project fully meets the criteria for co-production. Versions of Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation have often been used as a visual guide to levels of involvement (Arnstein, 1969). The figure illustrates a version of the ladder used by Fulfilling Lives currently.

The ladder is a useful aid to reflect on where different parts of the research process have reached, and how involvement could be increased if full co-production isn't possible. No matter which communities are being focused on, the aspiration of increasing their share of the process is key.

Scrutinise your assumptions

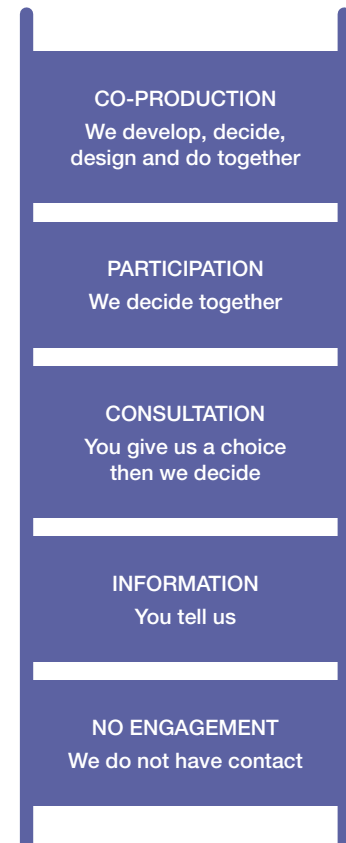
Co-producing research can expose assumptions made by all contributors. There can be a tendency in all co-produced work for artificial polarisation of roles. People who bring lived experiences often assume researchers are expert in all methods of research and analysis, provide a purely objective viewpoint, and have no lived experiences of the research topic. This position of artificial power for the researcher can be especially prevailing in communities which have traditionally experienced a lack of power or autonomy, particularly people with experience of multiple disadvantages.

Similarly, people who bring research skills to projects sometimes assume no other contributors have any formal research training and will be unable to manage their biases. These assumptions are usually unhelpful and untrue – we all have a mixture of skills to apply to the work. It is important to discuss these assumptions at the start of a project to get a more realistic set of expectations to work with.

A second assumption researchers can make is that all lived experiences are interchangeably representative. While all experiences are important and valid, it is important to acknowledge a diversity of experiences within the same issue, intersected by gender, age and background. In the case of multiple disadvantages, they could be different issues entirely – someone with a history of offending, street homelessness and substance misuse will not have the same experiences as a person who experienced offending, mental ill health and domestic abuse, for example. No individual can 'speak for' a whole group or set of experiences, so it is important to have multiple voices which can create balance in the messages feeding into the research.

All contributions should be equally valued

The input of every contributor in co-produced research has its own value and importance, and this should be reinforced throughout the process. An example of this might be a researcher with good theoretical knowledge of the criminal justice system. Their skills are certainly valuable, but they might be at a notable disadvantage when trying to conduct work in a prison setting. From knowing the visitation processes in practice to understanding slang terms, and even removing the symbols of authority the researcher might be inadvertently projecting to participants, practical knowledge can greatly improve the quality of a research. It is equally as valuable as the skills in project management, research methods and articulating findings which researchers are more likely to contribute to a research group.



One of the most valuable assets those with experience of multiple disadvantages can bring is best practice on how to approach people in complex situations to minimise risk and maximise feelings of safety within the research process. Peer-to-peer interviewing can also create a foundation of trust and ease which is hard to replicate without lived experience. Other lived experience assets might include knowing the language of the participants, therefore allowing involvement and access for groups which would otherwise not be able to get their voices heard in the research. Whatever the specific strengths, these assets should be treated as equally beneficial to the process.

Talk about what success looks like from different perspectives

In a project with multiple stakeholders there will be multiple perspectives on what success looks like. These usually extend beyond the agreed objectives for the research or the creation of a finished article or report. Creating research with real-world impact, developing skills and knowledge, or creating visibility for an issue are all valid reasons for involvement from all parties, and are measures of success. Discussions about defining success can also be useful in unpicking personal motivations connected to potential bias. It could be that a member of the group has a pre-formed opinion which they feel will be confirmed through the work. Equally, a researcher might have a desire for positive findings to increase likelihood of publication. By discussing these issues and naming motivations, it's possible to create a framework to evaluate success and minimise bias at the start of the project.

Create opportunities for learning and reflection

Learning from other people can be a real benefit of working co-productively. Rather than extracting value from each individual role, think about how to share assets within the group. Providing training on research skills for lived experience roles is as important as thinking about how best to absorb knowledge and expertise from lived experience for future work. The act of gatekeeping specific skills may give people with lived experience the impression that their involvement is solely because of that experience and not also due to their abilities and potential. If lived experience roles leave the project feeling upskilled in research management, interview skills or analysis, it also helps to support them in moving forwards in volunteering or career pathways.

Alongside the usual mechanisms and structures that a project would have in place to support people, it is also important to create space for community researchers to think about their personal boundaries within the research project. First-hand accounts of previous experiences can be very valuable, but the act of sharing these accounts can be emotionally charged and complex. It can be helpful to ask everyone to think in advance about how much of their life experience they would like to share with others, and to plan for any elements of the work they may find triggering or upsetting.

Safety planning on how to leave situations which are challenging can also help community researchers feel more prepared going into fieldwork situations. Scheduling time for reflection might be particularly relevant if experiences are recent, such as a parent having a child removed from their care.

Summary

Researching co-productively can take a little longer than more standard research approaches, and certainly takes reflection and practice to get right with any community. However, I believe working towards co-production can result in projects which all parties consider authentic and inclusive, and which create real impact for the communities focused on. It is a process with lots of bumps along the way, but I certainly feel that my research is richer and more grounded as a result of approaching work in this way.

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Capacity building in practice: how involving early career researchers in research awards can contribute to their development

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Abstract

Capacity building is a key objective of the UK Research Councils. Although poorly defined, capacity building is typically presented as enabling junior researchers to develop skills to facilitate future careers in research. Research Council documentation commonly discusses capacity building in principle, but it is often unclear how this is to be realised in practice. In this research note, junior researchers suggest several ways in which being associated with grant applications and awards can aid capacity building. They describe how the inclusion of junior researchers at all stages of the grant process can provide opportunities for gaining experience and learning through practice. While suggesting means of capacity building, challenging employment prospects in research should not be ignored, as is too often the case in Research Council literature. This note, therefore, concludes by asking how job creation relates to ideals of capacity building.

Introduction

A key objective of the UK Research Councils is 'capacity building'. The 2015 ESRC strategic plan (ESRC 2015) had four major objectives: fostering research and innovation; creating and maximising data infrastructure for research; building capability; and facilitating partnerships and realising impact. Building capability at the level of individual researchers is presented as building capacity at a systemic level. These were highlighted again in the delivery plan 2016-20 (ESRC 2016), with capacity building being one of seven overarching commitments. The Medical Research Council has similarly dedicated one of its four deliverables to 'research capacity and leadership' (MRC 2016: 2). The Research Councils have now aligned their respective delivery plans for 2019 and have included sections on 'foundational pillars'. One of these pillars is the development of 'talent, methods and leadership', within which the phrase 'capacity building' appears many times (ESRC 2019: 27).

Capacity building implicitly entails that institutions winning Research Council funding should prepare junior researchers for careers in research. For instance, the creation of doctoral training schools is repeatedly offered as an example of capacity building. It is also repeatedly related to ‘future leadership’, though again, this is not explicitly defined. In this paper, we work to a definition of capacity building as developing the skills of early career researchers with the intention of enabling them to have careers in research. We are aware that such a definition creates considerable ambiguity relating to whether capacity building is about developing research potential or realising that potential in formal employment as researchers, an issue to which we return.

It is clear from their recent outputs that the Research Councils are increasingly concerned with ‘capacity building’, particularly in relation to the development of early career researchers. While such developments are encouraged, it is not always clear precisely how capacity building aspirations should be realised in practice. Given that one of the Research Councils’ primary roles in research is reviewing and funding research project grants, we feel that grants are an area where capacity building could be given greater consideration. In response to calls for capacity building, we have gathered the thoughts of four doctoral students and five recent graduates of doctoral programmes at King’s College London (the authors). This research note briefly presents these ideas, outlining how capacity building for early career researchers can benefit from practical experience. The suggestions given below are informed by the experiences of researchers in one institution, which belongs to the ESRC-recognised **London Interdisciplinary Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership**.

Providing opportunities

One way in which early career researchers can benefit from capacity building activities is through the provision of opportunities to be associated with research grants. While training is a useful means of building researchers’ skillsets, it can be most effective when enacted through practical experience. Recruiters and potential employers are likely to be impressed by candidates with practical experience as well as academic accreditation. Practical experience can provide junior researchers with opportunities to build up tangible evidence of their capabilities and hence better showcase themselves in the job market.

The contributors to this research note agreed that a good way to initiate this process is to establish communication with early career researchers about the skills they expect to require to help advance in their chosen careers. Such dialogue is useful for senior academics in tailoring capacity building to the needs of junior researchers since they are likely to have valuable insights about skills are required for career progression. This dialogue is the responsibility of both supervisors and the junior researchers themselves. Involvement in funded projects provides an opportunity to develop specific aspects of researchers’ CVs that will be appealing to prospective employers, such as publishing, attending international conferences, delivering invited talks and lectures, seeking and managing grants, and establishing networks. Capacity building activities that directly address these factors enable early career researchers to demonstrate that they are acquiring these skills. Senior and junior researchers can discuss what opportunities can feasibly be created to facilitate the acquisition of desirable skills.

Capacity building can be incorporated into research grants from their conception by inviting early career researchers to participate in the development of grant applications. They can be entrusted with many of the tasks that such an application entails, for example, drawing up a list of appropriate funding streams or taking responsibility for a specific section of an application form. For many junior researchers the process of grant submission is relatively obscure. There can be considerable uncertainty over preliminary steps, such as how to find grant schemes and how to select the most appropriate ones. Involvement in the entire application process, from refining the initial idea through to drafting the final submission is a new experience for many researchers. To this end, early career researchers can be invited to attend meetings during grant development. Meaningful involvement in grant development also provides networking opportunities with senior researchers, funding agencies and other stakeholders associated with the

proposed project. This involvement can enable junior academics to develop useful contacts for future project development, as well as providing opportunities to learn how senior colleagues attained their positions. One of the contributors to this research note found involvement in the development of a grant application to be highly informative in many different aspects of project development, ranging from the delegation of workload to the importance of enlisting notable letters of support.

For successfully awarded grants, the most expedient way of encouraging the provision of opportunities for junior researchers can be through the delegation of various tasks to doctoral students and early career researchers. These tasks can range from small administrative roles within a project through to more research-focused activities. For example, a doctoral student can be paid to arrange preliminary workshops or advisory meetings, or they can be put in charge of drawing up a suitable sampling frame or recruitment strategy for the project – a widespread practice in some institutions. Administrative roles are as important as research-focused activities because they require the types of skills that may be overlooked in doctoral programmes, although they are a crucial aspect in conducting successful research projects. There is considerable scope for involving people in this way because research projects typically require a wide range of specific tasks, the delegation of which can provide numerous opportunities for junior researchers to gain valuable first-hand experience. The allocation of these tasks can be incorporated into grant applications, and funding bodies can further such initiatives through explicit encouragement in guidance notes for applicants.

One important task that can be allocated to early career researchers in the grant is the co-development of specific publications. Specific papers can be earmarked for co-authorship during the application. Indeed, junior researchers can be made responsible for proposing such articles. An early career researcher can be encouraged to act as lead author for a paper with a principal investigator in a mentorship role. The publication process can often seem intractable to doctoral students, and having an experienced supervisor to encourage and oversee the development of the student's first article is a major help to progression. Besides simply writing the article and gaining a publication, students benefit from senior mentorship regarding issues such as journal selection, letters to editors and responding to reviewers. Of course, these issues fall under the traditional remit of supervision, but additional support from other collaborators on separate projects is typically welcome.

As well as involving junior researchers in the publication process, they can be brought into the wider dissemination strategies of research awards. For example, they can help draft briefing notes for policymakers or design leaflets and/or posters communicating findings for project participants and other audiences. Junior researchers can be given opportunities to arrange dissemination events, developing key organisational skills. Involvement in briefing meetings with policymakers and other key stakeholders in relevant sectors provides early career researchers with valuable networking opportunities. Greater involvement in dissemination activities also provides insights into the ways in which research findings can be translated into practical outcomes.

Beyond incentivising the delegation of small tasks to junior researchers, a more ambitious capacity building strategy that grants can participate in is to incorporate opportunities for early career researchers to visit other institutions. Institutional visits are a valuable component in early career development. They allow junior researchers to build useful networks and give them an opportunity to experience the running of different departments, enabling a broader understanding of the many ways in which research is conducted. Grants involving multiple institutions can be particularly conducive to this approach. Principal investigators can be encouraged to exchange research assistants or to open up a small position for a doctoral student, even if only for a month.

Potential dangers

The danger with many of these suggestions is that they are difficult to implement if they depend on the willingness of junior researchers (particularly when they have reached the end of their own funding), to provide free labour in exchange for the promise of CV development. Such willingness is inseparable from the economic constraints faced by junior researchers entering a challenging job market. To avoid exploitation, the parameters of any formal involvement in the grant process must be clearly demarcated beforehand, and any work must be fairly recompensed. Usually, when junior researchers are involved in the development of a grant application prior to its submission, the funding for their roles cannot come from that grant. Instead, such roles need to be funded through the numerous small pots of money that are typically made available by individual institutions with such initiatives in mind. For example, a university might offer small pots of funding for development, collaboration or educational initiatives. Such money is well suited to the involvement of early career researchers in grant applications.

Beyond the concerns of individual grants, it is also important to acknowledge the overarching systemic issue of the lack of jobs that are available to early career researchers upon completing their PhDs. Junior researchers can benefit from senior colleagues being open from an early stage about the challenging nature of the contemporary academic job market. Indeed, the Research Councils' own outputs could benefit from providing more honest appraisals of employment prospects, an issue which is too rarely touched upon in discussions of capacity building. Of course, doctoral study is about a far broader process of personal development than employability alone, but jobs are typically among the most pressing concerns of junior researchers. Ultimately, capacity building is of little use if there are insufficient opportunities for those newfound capacities to be translated into formal employment. To this end, the most directly useful capacity building initiatives entail job creation. This is already built into many grants through the opening up of roles for post-doctoral research fellows on successfully funded projects. The pressing question is, therefore, whether more could be done to ensure that the job-creation element of grants is maximised for every application. Is capacity built when a prospective researcher develops the requisite skillsets but cannot find employment in an oversaturated research market? This is an issue about which both applicants and funding bodies must remain alert.

Conclusion

Recent calls by Research Councils for grants to focus on capacity building and the development of early career researchers are appealing in principle but require concerted effort if they are to be realised in practice. In this research note, we have suggested a range of ways in which the ideals of the Research Councils can be built into grant applications. Principally, we believe that the provision of practical opportunities offers the best means of capacity building, allowing junior researchers to develop their skills and prove their abilities. Therefore, where practicable, grant applicants should be encouraged to incorporate a range of opportunities, some minor and some more substantial, for meaningfully involving junior researchers in research projects. It must also be noted that the language of 'capacity' partially conceals the issue of whether there are formal employment opportunities to make use of research capacity once it is built. Questions remain as to whether capacity building is about developing the skills of potential researchers or realising that potential in formal research roles – or both.

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