MARCH:2023

SOCIAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

research matters

Using administrative data to investigate ethnic inequalities in the criminal justice system

By Angela Sorsby, lecturer in criminology, University of Sheffield and Kitty Lymperopoulou, research fellow, University of Plymouth and visiting research fellow, Manchester Metropolitan University

As ADR UK research fellows we have used Data First magistrates' and Crown Court datasets for England and Wales to investigate ethnic differences in experiences of the criminal justice system. This article reflects on the benefits and challenges of using administrative data in ethnicity research.

Ethnic inequalities in criminal justice

The 2017 Lammy Review demonstrated stark ethnic inequalities within the criminal justice system in England and Wales. These include:

- arrest rates are higher across minority ethnic groups compared to the white group
- despite making up just 14% of the population, ethnic minority men and women make up 25% of prisoners, and 40% of young people in custody are from ethnic minority backgrounds

Available statistics on ethnicity and the justice system, such as those published by the Ministry of Justice, indicate differences between ethnic groups in court case outcomes such as:

- ethnic minority groups are more likely to plead not guilty
- ethnic minority groups are more likely to be remanded in custody at Crown Court
- white defendants have lower average custodial sentence lengths

The Lammy Review highlighted the lack of evidence into the causes of inequalities. Indeed, published statistics don't control for other factors such as age and offence type to determine whether ethnic disparities could be explained by these things.

Opportunities from criminal justice administrative datasets

Before the Data First programme, detailed data on individual defendants by ethnicity in England and Wales was not generally available for academic research purposes. Unlike survey data which cover a sample of respondents, the Data First de-identified magistrates' and Crown Court datasets give access to case-level administrative data on all defendants in criminal court cases appearing in courts between 2013 and 2020. The main advantage of the datasets is that they provide a large sample size –13.4 million magistrates' court records and one million Crown Court records – with detailed information about the defendants, offence, proceedings and outcomes. They therefore enable researchers to gain insights about how people from different groups interact with the court system and to examine patterns and causes of ethnic disparities across different stages of the criminal justice system. Crucially, the datasets enable longitudinal analysis to examine defendants' appearances over time and to show pathways through the criminal justice system.

Challenges of using Data First

Considerable work has gone into producing the research-ready Data First datasets. However, there is much left to do to make the datasets suitable for answering specific research questions. Deriving variables often requires complex manipulations, combining information from several variables within and across the datasets. This can be challenging when working with large-scale datasets.

In our research, it is often necessary to go through numerous steps to derive variables. Identifying and counting previous convictions for the Data Insight publications (for example on the number of convictions before a short sentence of immediate custody and ethnic inequalities in sentencing in the Crown Court) required various steps including identifying:

- whether a defendant has entered the criminal courts on more than one occasion
- whether each case involving a defendant resulted in a conviction
- the timing of each conviction to determine whether it is a previous conviction

The Data First datasets were collected for administrative rather than statistical research purposes. Data from different systems and organisations had to be merged and processed. Inconsistencies in definitions and data formats between different information management systems and over time mean that bringing together data from different systems is a highly complex process for which best practice is still being developed. This complexity led us to make pragmatic modifications to our research questions and the data.

Limitations

The Data First datasets do not cover all aspects of the circumstances of an offence. They do not, for example, include information on the mental health of defendants nor on the harm caused to the victim. More datasets are being added as part of the Data First project, so more variables are becoming available through linkage with other datasets, such as probation. However, as administrative data depend on what has been collected, it is inevitable that the datasets may not contain all the information sought by researchers and research commissioners.

Taking ethnicity specifically, data is missing, particularly for less serious offences. In addition, coding of ethnicity is not fine-grained. For example, ethnicity categorisation within the court datasets uses the 16+1 ethnic classification from the 2001 England and Wales Census. Smaller ethnic minority groups such as Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller ethnic groups are not recorded, and residual 'other' ethnic group categories cover diverse groups of people.

Finally, administrative data analysis enables relationships to be identified but not necessarily how and why these relationships exist. Combining administrative data analysis with qualitative research could deepen understanding about the drivers of ethnic disparities.

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Creativity and advocacy

SRA co-chair, Diarmid Campbell-Jack, on thinking and working creatively

Welcome to this quarter's Research Matters.

Dare mention social research in your local cafe and you'll most likely be met with blank stares. If not, you might get the usual joke about nerds in their parents' basement doing data entry. The usual joke is completely wrong, as many of us now also spend time in our parents' basement doing data analysis. What people often miss is that creativity is a vital arrow in the researcher's quiver, regardless of whether the researcher focuses on qualitative or quantitative approaches.

Creativity has never been more important for the researcher than it is now. A common theme at a recent social research event I attended was the researcher as an advocate for evidence, working alongside stakeholders so they can see the benefits of our work. This advocacy work requires creativity, understanding other people's needs, exploring how evidence can help them, and thinking creatively about possible solutions where none are immediately apparent.

Two articles in this issue of Research Matters examine creativity. Those of us who attended the 2019 and 2021 SRA conferences will remember the research galleries and compendiums created by Jennifer Jones, showcasing creative outputs related to the research process. Jennifer reflects on her experience, and outlines plans for a research gallery on touch in the upcoming 2023 conference. You can easily submit a piece for the gallery by following the instructions in the article.

Our second piece on creativity is Benedict Guindi's entry in our Research Hinterlands series about how his drama has helped his research career. Benedict reflects on how treading the boards can develop people skills and provide the confidence we need when interviews go awry, we can't work out how to present our results, or an internal client asks tricky questions about that recalcitrant bit of admin data.

Researchers sometimes imagine that work as a government researcher is easy. Publish an Invitation to Tender (ITT), lounge around in palatial offices, and wait for agencies to enthusiastically outline their new, cutting-edge research designs. The reality is far different, especially the offices. Richard Self at the Welsh Government provides a valuable, practical example of work in government, explaining what social researchers in government do when you publish an ITT and don't get any responses.

Angela Sorsby and Kitty Lymperopolou expertly guide us through the murky depths of administrative data, showing how the strengths and weaknesses of admin data can shed insights on ethnic inequalities within the criminal justice system in England and Wales. Using diverse data sources accurately will only become increasingly important, with this piece a much-needed reminder of the practicalities involved.

Shirley Widdop outlines her role as a disabled lone parent and carer in two research projects focusing on participant involvement. Shirley points out what worked and what didn't in an experience she found 'exciting, rewarding and cathartic but also time consuming, tiring and emotionally draining at times'. We should all take time to read Shirley's piece and seriously reflect on the lessons we can learn.

Anyone interested in recent methodological advances should read this issue's book reviews, where we review works on respondent-centred design, critical realism for health and illness research, and using documents in your research project. The review section includes a new list of books across the range of research issues desperate for an SRA member to review, so contact admin@the-sra.org.uk to take up the opportunity.

Finally, we're looking forward to meeting you all for the SRA conference on Thursday 15 June. Debrett's is already calling it the can't miss event of the summer social season, so hopefully you'll make it along and manage to avoid the lurking paparazzi.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Research Matters. Keep an eye out for the latest news on events and activities on our website.

‘Nothing about us without us!’

By Shirley Widdop, person with lived experience

This phrase, often used by disabled communities, highlights the need for inclusion at all stages of decision-making processes, ensuring equitable access and treatment by those in power.

Many disciplines now involve people with lived experiences (PwLE) in research. As a disabled lone parent and carer in receipt of legacy benefits since 2005, I’ve participated in several inclusive projects. Covid Realities (2020-2022) and Changing Realities (2022 ongoing) are two such examples.

Project set up

Both projects encourage/d involvement through participants:

- beta testing the websites before online launch
- self-identifying as living on a low income with their families
- choosing their own pseudonyms via an online generator

In addition, regular ‘big ideas’ Zoom sessions generated new content – blogs, artwork and poetry – conveying, in our way, messages about living life in poverty. The ‘big question of the week’ feature enabled participants, alongside researchers and allied professionals, to pose their own questions to the group.

Website development

Several participants became beta testers before the launch of each project and website to:

- decide which colourways, fonts and logos were chosen
- ensure functionality and accessibility of each link and feature before launch, right down to the inclusion of a virtual shower of confetti that participants received on completing a diary entry or when answering questions (motivating and fun!)

Once launched, participants chose how to interact through individualised dashboards, through a choice of:

- video/audio recordings
- written diary entries
- uploading photographs or artwork

Participants choose their level of engagement – interacting as little or as much as desired, rewarded with a monthly gift voucher. Opportunities for further rewards through increased involvement in the project were provided through media interactions, blogging or writing articles.

Reflections on being involved

I’ve been an anti-poverty campaigner since 2018, working with organisations like the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) which resulted in being recruited to the Covid Realities project.

Arguably, bias may occur if only participants like myself are included in the research. However, over 100 participants throughout the UK took part, invited by the researchers through charity networks, word of mouth and social media, thus minimising bias.

Evening Zoom meetings (7.30pm to 9pm) suited most people’s schedules, generating amazing levels of camaraderie between participants and researchers, facilitated by letterbox ‘snack packs’ (tea, coffee, hot chocolate and biscuits) sent in advance by the team, which we enjoyed together. Meetings ran relatively well, following group-negotiated ground rules.

Zooms felt rushed at times. Unstable internet connections for some caused difficulties when contributing. Potential participants may have been deterred – digital exclusion due to poverty remains problematic. This is something that could be addressed in future, perhaps, by reimbursing data costs.

Zoom-only meetings meant participants never met in person, even at the launch of the Covid Realities book to which participants contributed, which was sad. Face-to-face is preferable as Zoom presents a digital barrier to non-verbal communications that ordinarily minimise misunderstandings. Thus, Zoom meetings alternating with in-person meetings would be welcomed.

Having benefited from bespoke media training from JRF before participating in Covid Realities and Changing Realities, I enjoy interacting with journalists. Safeguarding participants is vital when discussing distressing topics like poverty. Many participants engaged with the media but many didn’t have formal media training, causing anxiety. Media training needs integrating into future projects right from the start. That said, our voices were still heard across a wide range of media outlets including radio, TV and print, and participants’ skills and confidence grew.

Participating since 2020 has been exciting, rewarding and cathartic but time consuming, tiring and emotionally draining. Receiving gift vouchers while living on benefits increases temptation to participate in absolutely everything, necessitating regular breaks and strong personal boundaries to avoid burnout.

Project design

Participants’ welfare is paramount, and the researchers do care and signpost us to relevant resources. Participants tend to contribute willingly and unselfishly, so introducing regular wellbeing sessions is vital. While researchers can take annual leave, there’s no holiday from poverty. Future project design could incorporate school holiday schedules so participants don’t feel ‘on call’ to always respond. Additionally, involving PwLE in project planning from the start ensures the research process is truly inclusive.

A 'please do touch' exhibition: why now?

By Jennifer Jones, honorary research fellow, Department of Population Health Sciences, University of Leicester

The background

For the SRA's annual conference in 2019 I created a 'research gallery' to run during the conference. The purpose of the gallery was to display creative outputs which were related to any element of the research process. It was a success – the delegates enjoyed a variety of submissions including artwork, sculptures, short films, games and even a washing line of clothes with photos on them. Due to Covid-19, we were online for the 2021 conference, and I created a 'research compendium' space for people to submit poems, short stories, short films and so on. Again, this was well received with a good variety of submissions available for delegates to enjoy.

What next

Looking at the submissions across the two previous conference events, they focused on the senses of seeing and hearing (with 'games' being the exception). I wanted to see what would happen if I challenged people to use the sense of touch related to research. I have developed interactive posters for academic conferences in the past, and I have found most delegates find it quite challenging to touch a conference poster despite yellow sticky notes asking people to 'please touch'. This is a barrier that I would like to break down.

'Please do touch'

I think touch is a great way to transfer knowledge. If you look at the world of children's play, you see that touch is an integral part of learning. Throughout childhood so much is based on touch to explore the world around us: early toys (fitting shapes into holes), lift the flap books, crafting, building with Lego/Meccano are all great examples. So surely touch is the ideal sense through which to learn/gain information? Why, as we get older, do we reject that sense in preference to seeing or hearing information? I want to see if there are ways in which we can use touch within a research context to encourage learning and, potentially, to make research accessible to a wider audience.

To be able to submit a piece there are only three requirements:

The piece must be rooted in research but can speak to any part of the research process including, but not limited to: design, methods, results, outputs, researcher's experience

The piece must be portable so that it can be brought in person to the venue on the day

The piece must be touchable by any of the delegates – it can be a game, an interactive information poster, a leaflet, a printed comic, Lego pieces used to collect data, or anything else touchable

Creating a space

The usual poster sessions at conferences can be quite restrictive in what is allowed or expected. There is a lack of opportunity to share and promote creative work associated with research. This can be any part of the research process including collecting, analysing and presenting the data, as well as the researcher reflecting on their experience. As much as anything, I want to create a space where creative work related to research can be showcased to benefit both those displaying their work and those engaging with it.

I wanted to see what would happen if I challenged people to use the sense of touch related to research

Get involved

Covid-19 left us out of touch with many experiences. So, this exhibition at the SRA's 2023 annual conference on 15 June in London will put us 'back in touch'. As with the research gallery, I hope that delegates will arrive intrigued and leave inspired. Be prepared to leave feedback (in a very tactile way of course) if you are able to come to the conference. If you would like to submit a piece for the exhibition, the deadline for submitting your abstract is Friday 31 March (see requirements box). Download the submission form at: www.the-sra.org.uk/events

Government social research: where's that bid?

By Richard Self, Welsh Government/WEFO head of research, monitoring and evaluation

In the previous edition of Research Matters I set out what I look for in a good supplier response to an invitation to tender (ITT). In this follow up article I provide some background on what happens when we don't receive suitable, or worse, any bids.

What happens when we don't receive suitable, or any bids

Procurement of social research in government is a time-consuming activity, and we are often working to tight deadlines to deliver research. Drafting a research specification can take anywhere from one to three months. Standard process is to conduct a scoping phase to discuss the research requirements with our policy colleagues, which will include a separate literature review to assess what evidence is already available.

Once a research specification is agreed and a budget approved, at Welsh Government we work alongside our procurement colleagues to check that the specification is suitable to be advertised through an ITT. The size of the budget determines the complexity and number of the checkpoints required. Once signed off by procurement, the ITT is issued and this will be live typically for four to six weeks. ITTs over the Find a Tender Service (FTS) threshold of £138,760 (including VAT) for supplies and services need to be advertised for four to six months.

All bids received are reviewed by a panel of three or five staff, first individually and independently, and then together in a tender moderation panel, to agree a final consensus score.

If we do not receive any suitable bids, we seek feedback from suppliers about why they did not bid. Based on that feedback we review the ITT and decide whether to reissue as is or amend it. If we need to amend the ITT, we liaise with policy and procurement colleagues to ensure that any changes are appropriate and still meet their requirements. This may add a week or more before we can resubmit the ITT to procurement for reissuing. The ITT is then reissued.

> Feedback is invaluable as it helps us understand the reasons why there were no bids and the changes we may need to make

If we think that the original procurement platform may be a factor in the lack of bids, we may opt to use another platform, for example moving from a framework such as the Research and Insights led by Crown Commercial Services to an open tender through Sell2Wales. Switching procurement platforms requires us to reformat the ITT accordingly, and results in further investment of time.

Government procurement must demonstrate value for money. The procurement process is, therefore, rigorous and time consuming, involving many colleagues across government, as we need to apply an auditable, open and impartial process that is fair to all. Failure to award is costly, and often has knock-on effects for other projects. Time spent reissuing ITTs is time that cannot be spent working on other projects, so delays to project timelines are likely. This is a significant concern for time-sensitive evaluations such as European Union (EU) funded projects as we are working to immovable deadlines with the closure of the 2014-2020 EU programme looming.

I'll end this article with a repeat of my plea to all suppliers in the previous article. I mentioned above that we seek supplier feedback on our ITTs. This feedback is invaluable as it helps us understand the reasons why there were no bids and the changes we may need to make in order to receive a suitable number of bids for future procurements. Please let us know why you decide not to bid. This needs only be a couple of sentences, although we are happy to discuss in more detail if you wish to. This can be to your benefit too. If the reason is a lack of time to bid, we can make sure you are aware of any reissue of the ITT.

Acknowledgements

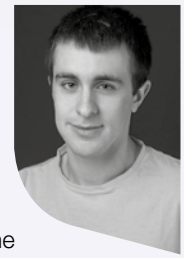
I would like to offer thanks for the advice of my colleagues at Welsh Government in producing this article: Pete Baylis (senior procurement manager), Rhian Davies (head of housing research) and Faye Gracey (head of data acquisition and linking for research). Any errors in this article are mine alone.

Research hinterlands

Do social researchers emerge fully formed? Do they have any other life for that matter? In this series, we check out the back stories of some of our social research colleagues. What's your hinterland? Do you have an interesting story to tell? Let us know!

Treading the boards

By Benedict Guindi, policy researcher, Citizens Advice



I started performing at a young age. I would describe myself as an 'introverted extrovert' and always have been. In truth, I think I've always been a bit of a show-off but, at the same time, socially awkward and shy. I think lots of performers are. They are self-conscious yet have this instinctive need to be liked, craving attention and validation. But is craving validation not a basic characteristic of what makes us human?

I got my first taste of the spotlight when singing in the school choir. At Christmas, I was that kid who would sing 'In the Bleak Midwinter' or 'Once in Royal David's City' in that high treble tone. I was also lucky enough to be taught speech and drama at this school. Having these two outlets early in life really fostered my love of singing and acting.

However, I was shy, struggled to make friends, and was unsure of myself. (I now know that I had undiagnosed autism spectrum disorder (ASD).) So, when I branched out from just a choir boy to doing plays, monologues and improv games, I relished the opportunity not to be myself anymore: to be a different person, someone who could be confident and self-assured.

It was the best feeling in the world: the nerves of standing backstage before you go on, the adrenaline rush of getting out there, getting a big laugh for a joke you told and then reaping in the applause during the bows. There is simply nothing like performing to a crowd.

This led me to be brave and to do things I could never have dreamed of being brave enough to do just a few years previously. I got a part as a lost boy in the local pantomime. Performing to over 700 people at just 12 years of age. At that point, I knew I wanted to be an actor one day.

Finding a balance

I didn't become an actor. I enjoyed school and was quite good at it. I loved physics, history and drama all equally. Eventually, discovering an interest in politics, I then studied it at uni. I joined the musical theatre society. I volunteered at a local Citizens Advice, which is where I found a love for social policy research. I knew that was what I wanted to do. On top of that, I could still keep my first love in my local am-dram scene. I could have my cake and eat it. I have been doing both for the last few years (Covid-19 put the brakes on the theatre for a bit). I just had my first lead in a musical, in the same local theatre in which I was once one of Fagin's gang in Oliver in 2006. I'm currently in rehearsals for another musical.

Flexing my creative muscles

So, why am I telling you all this? Well, there are two reasons. The first is the confidence and people skills that performing has given me in life. As a neurodivergent kid, I was able to put aside my anxiety and get up in front of hundreds of people. This has helped me have confidence in all aspects of my life, including work. It also teaches you teamwork and thinking on the spot. If something goes wrong on stage, it is up to you to think on your feet and to get through it while being watched by an audience. This skill is a massive help in work life. I'm sure there have been points when we, as researchers, are asked a question that throws you. Being able to not panic and to say something, say ANYTHING that sounds vaguely sensible, is hugely comforting and can get you far.

The second thing is that much of the work I do as a researcher can be very methodical, analytical and specific. I love sitting at a desk and analysing data or working in spreadsheets. But as researchers, we must not stifle our creativity. We can come up with creative ways of analysing data and making policy recommendations.

SRA annual conference 2023 #SRACONF23

Thursday 15 June • Royal College of Physicians, London NW1

It is now four years since we last got together in person so we are greatly looking forward to connecting again with friends and colleagues, old and new.

The SRA annual conference is the only forum the UK has for bringing together social researchers from all sectors and disciplines to share knowledge and ideas, to debate our most pressing professional issues, and, of course, to meet and talk.

Our 2019 conference attracted over 300 researchers and research users from central and local government and other public bodies, research agencies and institutes, academia, and the independent and charity sectors, representing the full range of research methodologies.

We look forward to seeing you on 15 June

This year we'll be welcoming three key speakers:

- **Robert Cuffe**, head of statistics at the BBC on 'Clearly communicating complexity – can it be done?'
- Fireside chat with **Catherine Hutchinson**, head of the Evaluation Task Force and chief social researcher for Cabinet Office, HM Treasury and Number 10
- **Professor Heidi Safia Mirza**, UCL Institute of Education on 'Decolonising research: rethinking race, gender and intersectional approaches to research'

Research in practice sessions

We'll have two sessions of multi-stream presentations from researchers in all sectors of social research, sharing their practical learning and insights.

Masterclasses led by methods experts

- Sensitive topics and vulnerable participants in qualitative research
- An infographic 101

And a session for early career researchers

'Please do touch' exhibition

- A collection of creative research pieces showing design, methods, results, outputs, researcher experience

Delegate rates

SRA members £75 to £140; £195 for non-members
10% early bird discount

Find out more and register

With thanks to: gide / closer The home of longitudinal research. / EBSCO INFORMATION SERVICES / MAXQDA The Art of Data Analysis / Quirkos / NCRM NATIONAL CENTRE FOR RESEARCH METHODS

What do you think of Research Matters?

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

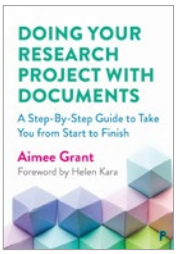
The editorial team is keen to hear from readers what you think about the magazine.

- are there any industry sectors, methods or disciplines you would like to see included in Research Matters more often?
- or other features or series you would like to suggest?
- or would you like to write a regular column on an industry hot topic?

Please email admin@the-sra.org.uk with any ideas.

You do not need to contribute to any future features but are more than welcome to do so if you would like!

Doing your research project with documents: a step-by-step guide to take you from start to finish



Aimee Grant

Policy Press, 2022

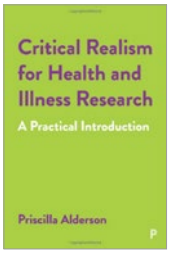
Reviewed by Natacha Harding, University of Winchester

A sign of a good book, for me, is one that looks a little rough round the edges from being in my bag and being re-read. A useful book has endless sticky tabs and notes, with underlining throughout and scribbled notes. *Doing your research project with documents* by Aimee Grant is both. Having read Grant's previous work, *Doing excellent social research with documents* (2019), I expected this text to be a similar level of practical, accessible, advice and guidance, and I was not disappointed.

Doing your research project with documents aims to do exactly as the title states – it takes the reader through completing a research project using documents from start to finish. The level of detail, explanation and guidance offers a great resource for beginner researchers (such as those completing their undergraduate dissertation) through to more seasoned researchers supervising or conducting a first document-based project. Personally, this book has become a recommendation for staff and students alike who are embarking on conducting or supervising a documents-based dissertation at undergraduate and postgraduate taught levels. The structure of the book offers a mix of dip in and out guidance as well as a map for a whole project. I particularly appreciate the sketches throughout that offer tips in a light-hearted way.

At its core, Grant's work explores robust research design, offering a framework for conducting such research, using a wide range of case studies that those considering this approach to research can relate to. The checklists, activities and timelines included in the text (and available as downloadable resources) allow the reader/researcher to make the book the guide to their own research. It's a must have for those approaching or supervising document-based research for the first time.

Critical realism for health and illness research: a practical introduction



Priscilla Alderson

Policy Press, 2021

Reviewed by Anneliese Levy, health communications and research consultant, Thoughtful Content

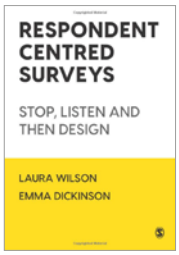
Critical realism for health and illness research aims to help researchers who are on the first few rungs of the critical realism (CR) ladder. Alderson presents the book as just the beginning of the CR journey for people who are new to this philosophy, (like me!). I started my own healthcare work in a clinical setting so my introduction to research was through a positivist lens: randomised control trials and systematic reviews as the gold standard. However, later in my career, my work has exclusively been qualitative and interpretivist in nature. So, what spoke to me about CR and this book is the effort to reflect on the tension and interplay between these two 'sides', and how they can work together using a broader approach.

The book, therefore, sets out to resolve this divide between the main health research traditions, to show how CR differs from other research approaches including realist evaluation, and to highlight practical applications of CR.

Where Alderson does this best is with case studies: first-hand accounts of health and illnesses researchers using CR in their work, for example Stuart Green Hofer's work using the four social planes to 'reveal new insights and connections' in the physical health of people with serious mental illness. Alderson herself acknowledges that CR is 'often dismissed as too dense and jargon-ridden' and parts of the book are packed with complex, technical language. However, I also loved the fact that the text is dripping with wide-ranging ideas, theories and stories of global health research, most of which were new to me. Certain ideas particularly resonated, such as the structure-agency dialectic which connects with the work I do, for example looking at health literacy and health service access.

I finished the book feeling hopeful that CR has the potential to address a lot of the current health policy challenges the UK faces, for example in Alderson's suggestions for greater interdisciplinary working and tackling 'upstream' root causes of health inequalities. The trick will be in whether it's possible to communicate the CR philosophy more widely. This book is part of that.

Respondent centred surveys: stop, listen and then design



Laura Wilson and Emma Dickinson

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

Reviewed by Katriina Lepanjuuri, associate director, Ipsos UK

Ever come across complex terminology that doesn't reflect the way issues are discussed by survey respondents, long questionnaires capturing data in inefficient ways, legacy questions which are still there because…well, they have always been? All too often survey commissioners and designers are still focused on their own information needs, leaving respondents who dedicate their precious time to take part in research deeply unsatisfied with the survey experience, or simply confused. This book aims to turn this rigid view around, presenting respondents as valuable actors whose needs and ways of thinking need to be understood, valued and incorporated in research design. The approach this book advocates is called respondent-centred survey design. This draws from user-centred design applied in the tech industry characterised by iterative user research and testing, and brings it to the world of survey research.

The beauty of the book is that it is highly practical and applicable across various settings. It starts by detailing the respondent-centred design principles and frameworks, but then moves quickly to explain how these can be applied in practice and even how to implement a respondent-centred approach with different levels of resources. The concrete examples from the Office for National Statistics bring the work to life.

It's written in an engaging, practical and fresh way which makes it a pleasure to read. It encourages a deeper engagement with your work, and an understanding and appreciation of respondents' mental models through testing. It is a must read for anyone designing respondent-facing tools and materials, whether working in academia, government or a research agency. This is particularly so in the face of falling response rates and as more and more research is moving online where interviewers are not present to help respondents navigate the survey concepts.

It will transform your ways of thinking.

Titles for review

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

The craft of qualitative longitudinal research
Bren Neale
SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021

Doing qualitative research – sixth edition
David Silverman
SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

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

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

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

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

The practitioner guide to participatory research with groups and communities
Kaz Stuart and Lucy Maynard
Policy Press, 2022

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

Researching with care: applying feminist care ethics to research practice
Tula Brannelly and Marian Barnes
Policy Press, 2022

Social research: issues, methods and process – fifth edition
Tim May and Beth Perry
McGraw Hill, 2022

Training courses in research methods

Unless otherwise stated, all courses are run online using Zoom.

In-person courses are held in London. Online courses run over one day or two half days, and extended courses over two full days or three part-days.

New dates and courses are being added all the time, so please visit www.the-sra.org.uk/training for updates.

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

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

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

Evaluation

(All with Professor David Parsons unless otherwise stated)

28 March (in person): Theory-based evaluation: options and choices

29 March (in person): Building and using a theory of change

19 April: Foundations of evaluation

20 & 21 April (2 mornings): Theory-based evaluation: options and choices

10 May: Impact evaluation (advanced)

16 May: Research and evaluation project management

6 June: Foundations of evaluation, with Sally Cupitt

Qualitative

23 March: Reporting qualitative data, with NatCen

23 & 24 March (2 afternoons): Positionality and reflexivity in qualitative research, with Dr Nicole Brown

29 March: Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

12 April: Digital qualitative interviews, with Dr Karen Lumsden

21 April: Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

26 April: Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

16 to 18 May (3 part-days): Analysis of qualitative data, with Nat Cen

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

19 May: Narrative analysis, with Dr Karen Lumsden

26 May: Conducting online focus groups, with Dr Karen Lumsden

1 June: Introduction to qualitative interviewing, with Dr Karen Lumsden

8 & 9 June (2 afternoons): Creative methods in qualitative data collection, with Dr Nicole Brown

9 June: Qualitative data analysis, with Dr Karen Lumsden

14 June (in person): Conducting focus groups, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

16 June (in person): Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

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

5 July (in person): Qualitative interviewing, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

6 July (in person): Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

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

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

12 to 14 September (3 part-days): Designing and moderating focus groups, with NatCen

14 September: Reporting qualitative data, with NatCen

28 & 29 September (2 full days): Depth interviewing skills, with NatCen

9 & 10 October (2 part-days): Managing challenging interviews, with NatCen

26 & 27 October (2 mornings): Introduction to qualitative research, with NatCen

Quantitative

24 March: Introduction to R for social researchers, with Dr Alexandru Cernat

29 & 30 March: Cognitive interviewing, with NatCen

17 April: Data management and visualisation with R, with Dr Alexandru Cernat

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

12 May: Introduction to sampling, with Dr Alexandru Cernat

23 to 25 May (3 afternoons): Advanced questionnaire design, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

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

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

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

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

Other research skills

27 March: Writing effective research reports, with Dr Simon Haslam

26 April (in person): Graphic design know-how for social researchers, with Lulu Pinney

24 May: International multidisciplinary research project management, with Dr Dave Filipovic-Carter

25 May (in person): Data visualisation and infographic design, with Nigel Hawtin

2 June: Consultancy skills for social researchers, with Dr Simon Haslam

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

16 June (in person): Research with children and young people, with Berni Graham

19 & 20 June (2 afternoons): Doing evidence reviews using qualitative software, with Dr Christina Silver

4 July: Data Visualisation and infographic design, with Nigel Hawtin

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

Spotlight on SRA activity

Training
www.the-sra.org.uk/training

Many qual, quant and evaluation courses are online.

Events
www.the-sra.org.uk/events

Blog
www.the-sra.org.uk/blog

Topical posts on researching.

Journal
www.the-sra.org.uk/journal

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

Resources
www.the-sra.org.uk/resources

Good practice guides and more.

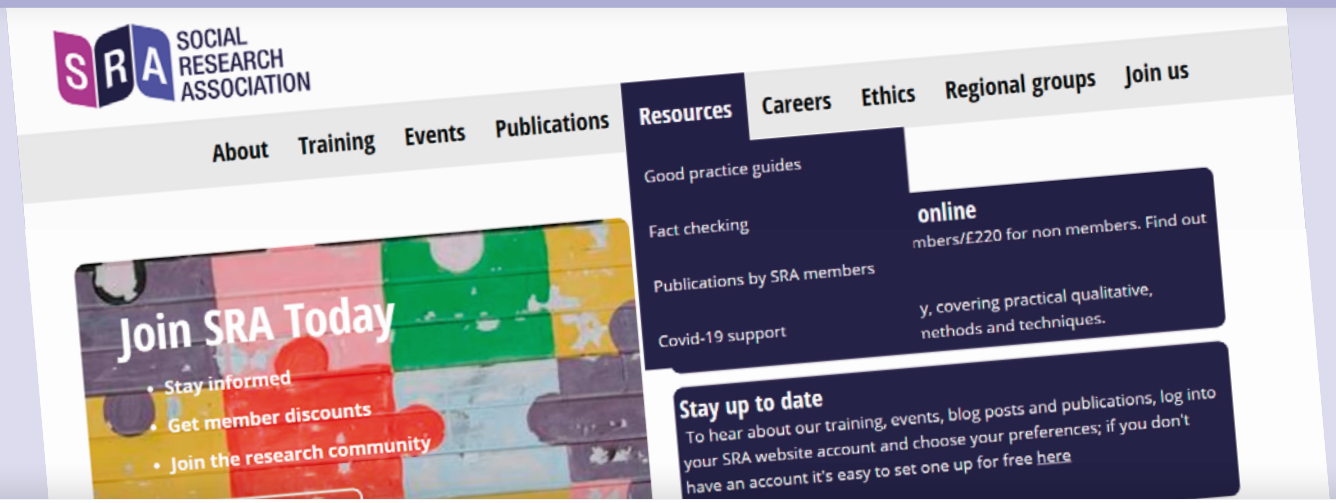
Ethics
www.the-sra.org.uk/ethics

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

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

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

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



SRA SOCIAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

research matters

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

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The Social Research Association (SRA)
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