SEPTEMBER:2024

SOCIAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

Equality, diversity and inclusion special issue

research matters

The elephant in the room

By Shivonne M Gates, impact and evaluation lead, Frontline

In 2020, society underwent seismic changes. We were in the midst of a global pandemic, while reckoning with racial justice in a way never seen before.

Attention initially focused on police brutality in the US, but this very quickly shifted to challenges closer to home. Black Lives Matter protests were held across the UK. A statue of a slave trader, Edward Colston, was thrown into Bristol harbour. Focus was brought to British victims of police violence such as Mark Duggan and Rashan Charles.

These events triggered lots of difficult conversations, earnest reflecting and promises of change, including within the social research sector. The social research sector has always been overwhelmingly white and middle-class. But, historically, little has been done to acknowledge or address this.

So, four years later, where are we now?

Good intentions

In 2021, the SRA commissioned a survey exploring diversity and inclusion in the social research profession. While the results were not representative, with a sample size of 979, the data indicate a strong sense that the sector lacks racial diversity: only 13% of respondents felt that people from ethnic minority groups are well represented at all levels of their current organisation and this figure falls to just one-tenth (10%) among ethnic minority researchers.

The SRA report found that, while there was a steep hill to climb, there was appetite for change in the sector, and organisations were already making steps in the right direction. In particular, the report notes that there is a range of commitments such as the MRS inclusion pledge, Business in the Community's race at work charter and the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index that promote collective accountability, and many research organisations refreshed their approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) following the events of 2020.

There has been evidence of this appetite beyond the report too. For example, in 2022, Social Researchers of Colour held a workshop for senior leaders to develop solutions to diversity and inclusion challenges faced by their organisations. It was attended by over 70 leaders from across the sector.

More widely, there have been efforts made across the sector to improve diversity. The use of debiased tools in recruitment is increasingly common, and the UK's first ever bespoke degree apprenticeship for social research was launched earlier this year.

A long way still to go

The recommendations in the SRA report focused on making meaningful change in organisations by changing culture and by committing time and resource. However, what has been evident through my work with Social Researchers of Colour is that, without senior leadership driving change from the top, things have largely stayed the same.

Building on the recommendations in the 2021 report, in conclusion, I would more strongly assert the need for systemic change to research organisations and the sector more widely, with a focus on:

- **retention and progression**
  - There is no point improving diversity of new hires if organisations don't then put resource into developing, retaining and promoting staff from minoritised backgrounds. Anecdotally, there is a sense that researchers of colour need to move organisations to progress in our careers, as organisations do not put as much energy into our development and progression as our white peers. Research organisations need to do better at making minoritised staff feel valued, and rewarding them for their hard work.
- **research funding and design**
  - There has been some shift towards including a wider range of views in funding decisions and research commissioning. Consultation groups like youth advisory boards, race equity associates and community panels are increasingly common. But the question remains as to whether these groups can effect meaningful change. Funders need to do more to hold researchers to account, and researchers need to do more to think outside the box when it comes to sampling and research design.

SRA JOURNAL 'Social Research Practice'

Issue 14, summer 2024, is free to download from the publications section of the SRA website.

The overall aim of the journal is to encourage and promote high standards of social research for public benefit. It promotes openness and discussion of problems. We welcome offers of articles and research notes for future issues. Read the guidelines for authors and download the article template.

If you have an idea for an article or research note but are not sure if it's suitable, please email the editor Richard Bartholomew: rabartholomew@btinternet.com

Nothing can be changed unless it is faced

SRA chair, Ed Dunn, on commitment to EDI

Welcome to the September edition of Research Matters I hope you have had an enjoyable and restful summer!

An aspect of the summer that was certainly not enjoyable was the appalling unrest, racist and Islamophobic behaviour that followed the awful and heinous attacks in Southport. While calm appears to be returning, and the swift actions across the criminal justice system are to be lauded, I know many of us are still filled with horror, sadness and unease. Our guidance on researcher and participant safety is on our website for anyone with safety concerns. I want to thank the trustees and SRA staff who came together to publish this guidance and offer support to our membership so quickly.

I'm delighted our September edition focuses specifically on issues around equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). As many of you know, this has been a specific area of focus for us, and there are several articles that are of interest to our strategic work in this area.

In thinking about how we respond, I want to draw upon some words I've selected from a brilliant post one of our trustees, Dan Clay, shared on LinkedIn in the aftermath of the unrest. In his call to action, Dan wrote:

'What I want to say, however, is more directive and it is to those of you in my network who work with members of the public in research, comms and community engagement. This is what happens when we build a society in which people lose hope of a better future for them and their loved ones, where the connective bonds of community break down, where we do not acknowledge or respond to people's pain and frustration, and where inequalities are allowed to keep getting wider and wider. It is what happens where divisive and spiteful politicking is normalised.

'As insight and communications professionals, our role is to understand and engage people. I'm privileged to have the opportunity to do this to inform social policy. In our roles we have the opportunity to be a small part of the solution here. So, my call out is to please ensure that you do your utmost to reach those groups who are seldom heard and who face barriers to being heard. And these may not always be the most visible minorities, but also the invisible majorities. People lash out when they feel misunderstood, beaten down, unheard and not in control of their own lives.

'Think about who you're working with, how you're removing barriers to participation, how you might build confidence and capability within communities, and how you might enable people to connect with one another. We can play a role here in facilitating understanding through dialogue. Through more collaborative and co-creative exercises we can empower people with new skills and experiences that can help give them greater confidence and control over their own lives. And we can help those in positions of power to share this understanding, delivering support which start to address the causes rather than the symptoms of the problems we are currently facing.

'To paraphrase James Baldwin, nothing can be changed unless it is faced. Let's face up to the responsibility of effecting positive change where we can.'

Thank you, Dan.

At our September board meeting the trustees of the SRA will be considering further how we respond. We will consider what more the SRA can do, and how to give a platform to those who face barriers to being heard. We will examine who we work with, and that includes what social media channels we use. Our forthcoming strategy will contain our commitments in this area and those that our EDI group have been working on. For now, I hope you will all enjoy reading the contributions our authors are making to this important endeavour, and I want to thank them for their contributions to this priority topic.

By way of introduction

By Tina Haux, SRA chief executive

It is an honour, a privilege and great fun to take the SRA forward. I am aware that I have big shoes to fill as Graham Farrant has steered the SRA through choppy waters with great clarity, calmness and warmth. He is handing over the SRA in excellent shape with a healthy membership, great staff and in a good financial position.

I first came across the SRA when I started as a research officer at what is now Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). I was one of only three social researchers at HMRC and I was keen to connect with other researchers. Thus, I joined the events committee of the SRA and got involved in organising seminars and annual conferences. Over time I got involved in the Social Policy Association (SPA) as the honorary secretary for seven years before becoming a member of the ESRC's funding panels.

In my day job I moved from HMRC to Gingerbread, the single parent charity, to working as a social policy academic at the universities of Lincoln and Kent respectively. At Kent, I took over as director of Qstep, a Nuffield- and ESRC-funded initiative to make social science graduates more numerate. After that I worked at the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) as director of the children and families team and as a research consultant.

In my own research, I have moved from research on lone parents and work obligations, challenging government assumptions about the likely success of new policies, to investigating the links between child contact before and after separation, exploring the understanding and measuring of shared parenting as well as writing about research impact. As well as publishing in academic journals, I have been on journal editorial boards, edited books and even written my own (on research impact).

It is an honour, a privilege and great fun to take the SRA forward

I have used both (longitudinal) quantitative and qualitative methods and been involved in evaluations while at NatCen but would say that research design is my favourite part, certainly the module I most enjoyed teaching at university.

It turns out that a CV of having done many things fits well with the role of the CEO of the SRA in that one of its many strengths is its methodological breadth as well as the range of employers of its members.

Now that I have this wonderful opportunity, my plans are to improve the membership offer, continue to provide excellent and innovative training, build on the SRA's role of providing ethics guidance to the sector and enhance the visibility and impact of social researchers across the UK. However, more than that, I want to create a sense of community and belonging among SRA members. The SRA has already dedicated funds towards many of these goals: enhancing the membership, early careers, regional events and EDI. A focus on and commitment to EDI is integral to all these activities, and I am pleased that the SRA has an active EDI working group and already momentum through the research reports and events. Please see the forthcoming strategy for more detail on all of this.

Altogether, I am delighted to have been given the opportunity to work for and with so many excellent researchers. Please let me know your thoughts and ideas for what the SRA should do more or less of, or differently. I am keen to hear from all of you. Also, if you would like me to come and talk to researchers at your organisation or to attend an event, please get in touch. I also hope to meet you at one of the SRA's training courses or events in the future.

You can email Tina at:
Tina.Haux@the-sra.org.uk

EDI in survey data collection: differential incentives?

By Gerry Nicolaas, Director of Methods, the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen)

Despite the increasing use of administrative records and alternative data sources, government departments and other research commissioners continue to rely on surveys to help them understand the reality of people's lives, and to develop and improve services to the public. However, there is growing awareness that surveys struggle to reflect the diversity of the population, and more needs to be done to improve the inclusion of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society.[1]

Can differential incentives produce more inclusive survey data?

One promising practice for improving the inclusiveness of survey data is the use of differential incentives with survey participants incentivised differently based on (a) characteristics that are either available on the sampling frame or collected during fieldwork, or (b) their behaviour (for example reluctance/refusal to take part). This can take different forms: incentives versus no incentives, given to all or only those who co-operate, different values, different types and so on.

The use of differential incentives is common practice in the USA where they have been used and evaluated since the 1990s. Overall, these US studies show that differential incentives are effective at persuading reluctant respondents, decreasing non-response bias, and are cost effective because they are only given to a small sub-sample.

Differential incentives are also being used in the UK, but the evidence base is limited, and its practice remains controversial. There is widespread concern among research ethics committees, survey sponsors and survey providers that giving incentives to some and not others will violate expectations of equity. However, it can also be argued that treating everyone equally does not necessarily achieve equity.

Differential incentives are not inherently unethical

In June 2019, a workshop funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) considered the ethics of using differential incentives in survey research. The main conclusion was that differential incentives are not inherently good or bad. Whether their use is acceptable depends on the importance of including hard-to-persuade groups, the reasons why these groups are less likely to take part, and evidence that differential incentives will achieve the desired objective of reducing non-response bias and/or improving inclusiveness.

The workshop report includes eight draft principles to help guide researchers in their decision on whether to use differential incentives:

1. The use of differential incentives in surveys is not inherently good or bad but depends on the context and how they are implemented.
2. Researchers must provide a clear justification for using differential incentives.
3. The justification should balance the interests of the survey sponsor, the organisation collecting the survey data, the participant and society.
4. The reasons for using differential incentives should be based on evidence that these are likely to reduce non-response bias and/or improve inclusiveness, while controlling costs.
5. The impact of differential incentives on participants' rights, dignity and autonomy needs to be considered.
6. The value of differential incentives should be proportionate to the perceived burden imposed on those who are eligible to receive the incentive and limited to what is necessary to achieve the desired effect.
7. Receipt of the differential incentive should be based on the characteristics and/or behaviour of the participant and not dependent on others (for example, it cannot be conditional on whole household co-operation).
8. The use of differential incentives should be transparent unless this will undermine participants' rights (for example confidentiality) and dignity (for example stigmatisation).

Time to revisit the practice and ethics of differential incentives

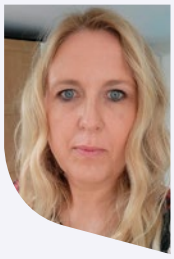
Given the commitment to produce more inclusive data, now is a good time to revisit the practice, evidence and ethics of using differential incentives in the UK. Under Phase 2 of the UKRI ESRC-funded Survey Futures programme, UCL and NatCen will soon be starting a new project to:

- review current practices in the UK
- carry out an experiment on a UK push-to-web survey
- develop a 'code of ethics' and advocate for its adoption by survey sponsors, professional research associations and research ethics committees.

[1] The National Statistician's Inclusive Data Advisory Committee and The MRS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Council.

Survey inclusivity at ONS

By Véronique Siegler, co-lead of the ONS Survey Research and Behavioural Insights (SurBI) Hyb/Hub



Our research team within the (SurBI) Hyb/Hub is dedicated to enhancing the quality and efficiency of social survey data collection at ONS. Since 2021 we have been running the ONS 'Inclusivity in Data Collection' programme, initiated to identify and address barriers to participation in social surveys. The programme includes research aimed at understanding the experiences of people with certain disabilities or neurodivergence throughout the survey process, considering all touchpoints and modes of completion.

Methodological approach

We used focus groups and semi-structured interviews, targeting individuals with one or more of the five most common mental health conditions, visual impairments, those who are D/deaf or hard of hearing, and neurodivergent participants.

Overcoming recruitment challenges

Recruitment was conducted through charities. This offered opportunities and challenges. Charities provided access to targeted groups and specific knowledge, enhancing our understanding of participants. However, initial engagement was often slow, requiring persistent follow-up and relationship-building. Transitioning from email to video calls and face-to-face meetings significantly improved engagement. Recruitment through charities was less costly but more time-intensive than recruitment panels.

Advertising the recruitment through a charity's newsletter, which reached a wider audience than anticipated, led to fake participants attempting to sign up, possibly attracted by the advertised incentive. To address this, we implemented extra checks and scrutiny, removing suspected illegitimate sign-ups. We excluded anyone who did not provide an address, and verified that the needs they listed for their everyday life and for the interview aligned with the information provided in the screening form.

Some charities helped with recruitment by selecting participants that met our requirements. We intend to further refine our recruitment strategy through charities. This will include considering where to advertise, whether to include the incentive amount, and finding better ways to collaborate with charities over recruitment.

The value of advisory groups

We set up advisory groups of experts and individuals with lived experience. Establishing and maintaining these required time and effort but was worthwhile. These groups provided critical insights and guided us in using appropriate language and targeting the right participants. They helped us adapt our recruitment materials to make them accessible for potential participants. They advised our team to attend awareness training on different conditions. This equipped us to conduct interviews sensitively and effectively.

Tailoring interview processes: a user-centred approach

Customising the interview process to meet the needs of diverse participants was a critical aspect. Adaptations required time and resources but were essential for ensuring that participants felt comfortable and respected. A user-centred approach implies that no needs are assumed; instead, we ask participants about their requirements. Finding suitable interview space was challenging. Using British Sign Language interpreters was costly, as we had to pay even for last-minute cancellations. Positive feedback from participants highlighted the importance of a tailored approach. One said, 'I have found this whole process quite stress-free really because you gave me the freedom to be myself.'

From research to operationalisation

Conducting the research was crucial, but equally important was considering how to implement the findings. Operations and research are different worlds, yet both are essential for inclusive data collection. As a former survey manager, I recognise the need for continuous dialogue between researchers and operations to create actionable recommendations, such as developing the survey process tailored to individual needs. Implementing suggested changes like video interviewing presents challenges, especially as ONS operations span the UK and multiple surveys. These changes must be integrated throughout the data-collection process, requiring comprehensive co-ordination and planning to ensure coherent implementation. This includes consideration of communication, technology, systems, interviewer training, ethical considerations and safeguarding. We organised a workshop to gather feedback from researchers and operational colleagues, and already there is progress.

Conclusion

By sharing our approaches and lessons learned, we hope to inspire other researchers to adopt similar practices for conducting inclusive research. Ensuring that all voices are heard is essential for representative and meaningful data, contributing to informed policymaking. As one participant said, 'A one-size-fits-all approach is outdated'. Researchers should be flexible, patient and open-minded in their efforts to conduct inclusive research. They should understand diverse needs, rather than make assumptions, and work closely with experts, people with lived experience, other researchers and operational staff. This is vital for advancing the quality and inclusivity of social surveys.

For more information, please contact us at Behavioural_insights@ons.gov.uk

Social research degree apprenticeship: an employer's perspective

By Chuma Gondwe-Atkins, research officer, The Health Foundation

The importance of diversity in the social research profession

While we recognise the importance of involving and engaging the public in research, we must also consider the researchers themselves. Empirical evidence shows that research is of higher quality when it is conducted by diverse groups.[1] Participants are more likely to feel comfortable and to engage with researchers who share similar socio-economic, ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds, as common experiences can help researchers to better understand participants and build rapport, boosting research participation rates among minority populations.[2]

The SRA and The Young Foundation's landmark report 'Diversity and inclusion in UK social research' found that the social research sector has far to go in terms of how representative it is of wider society and the extent to which diversity and inclusion are valued.[3] The report recommended that much more needs to be done to improve access, as routes to becoming a social researcher can be challenging.

As a foundation, we are working towards the goal of improving the diversity of the health services research ecosystem. One of the ways we are pursuing this is by employing a social research degree apprentice and also working with HSR UK to explore the barriers and facilitators to careers in health and care research, as well as the steps required to facilitate the uptake of apprenticeships among employers in the sector. We have learned valuable lessons along the way in establishing this initiative, especially recruitment, as noted in the following section.

Lessons from recruitment

1. Take more time than you think you need to review applications, shortlist and interview. Inclusive practice within the social research profession often gets squeezed out because of timing, money, or other resources.[4] Take the necessary time to thoroughly review applications and ensure a fair shortlisting process.
2. Interview remotely if possible or cover travel expenses if interviews are in person. Remote interviews can widen your pool of candidates by making it easier for individuals from different geographical locations to apply. If in-person interviews are necessary, consider covering travel expenses to remove financial barriers that might prevent some candidates from attending.
3. Showcase your organisation's strengths. Apprentices are often looking for more than just a job; they are looking for an inclusive and supportive environment where they can grow and learn. Showcase your commitment to professional development, inclusive practices, mentorship arrangements and any unique benefits you offer.
4. Look for potential, not the finished article. Remember, you may be employing someone who has not worked in an office environment and may not possess the technical skills that a graduate would have. Apprenticeships are designed to be learning opportunities. So look for candidates who show enthusiasm, a willingness to learn and the ability to grow into the role. Focus on assessing skills such as communication, problem-solving and motivation, as these are crucial for success in social research. Make it clear in recruitment adverts and throughout the hiring process that you are looking for potential, not just technical expertise.

What next for us?

We are excited to welcome our first social research degree apprentice in September and are committed to making this apprenticeship as impactful and rewarding as possible. We look forward to learning from this experience and sharing best practice with other members of the employer co-ordination group. We hope to share our findings on the barriers and facilitators to careers in health and care research and steps to boost apprenticeship uptake in the health services research community later on this year. We hope these insights will encourage the sector to address these barriers and foster an inclusive and supportive environment for aspiring researchers. Stay tuned!

[1] Campbell, L. G., Mehtani, S., Dozier, M.E. and Rinehart, J. (2013). Gender-heterogeneous working groups produce higher quality science. *PLOS One*. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0079147

[2] Kraft, S.A., Cho, M.K., Gillespie, K., et al. (2018). Beyond consent: building trusting relationships with diverse populations in precision medicine research. *American Journal of Bioethics, (18)4*. https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2018.1431322

[3] Social Research Association; The Young Foundation. (2021). Diversity and inclusion in UK social research. https://the-sra.org.uk/common/Uploaded%20files/Resources/SRA%20Diversity%20in%20Research%20Report%20Final_210701.pdf

[4] Ibid.

SEND futures longitudinal study: discovery phase

By Line Knudsen, research director, National Centre for Social Research; and Joas Flynn, senor social research officer, Department for Education

Children and young people (CYP) with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) represent more than 17% of the school population in England, equating to over 1.5 million pupils. These CYP face additional barriers compared with their peers and, on average, do less well on measures such as educational achievement and labour market outcomes.

Currently we do not have enough robust, nationally representative data on how these CYP are getting on in other aspects of their lives nor quantitative data on their school experiences, including whether the support they receive shapes their experiences and later outcomes.

What we did

In a recent study, the SEND Futures Discovery Phase, we set out to understand how to gather such data. Across two waves, we collected quantitative data from a nationally representative sample of around 3,000 pupils with SEND in year 8 and year 9 (aged between 12 and 14) and their parents/carers across England. The survey used face-to-face in-home interviews, telephone interviews and online surveys.

A key part of the study was to trial different approaches to engaging a wide and diverse range of young people. The study included young people with a range of needs, and a large sub-sample from groups who have tended to be under-represented in surveys.

What we learned

It is possible to do a representative large-scale survey with young people with SEND and their families. We achieved response rates that were comparable with other studies and incorporated protocols to make the study more inclusive. However, we were not able to reach all the young people we set out to hear from, and learned important lessons about areas we need to think more about.

We identified several strategies that can help make our surveys more inclusive.

- Around half of the young people who took part received support from an interviewer and/or a parent. This introduces variability in the data collection which is largely unknown and (especially in the case of parents) difficult to control. Developing protocols/advice on how to provide and record support can help address uncertainty for interviewers and participants, and help assess data quality issues.
- Using different survey modes may encourage and enable different groups to take part. In line with conventional (survey) wisdom, a face-to-face approach was generally associated with higher response and engagement. Nevertheless, an online mode may be particularly suitable for some young people, including some autistic young people and those with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- A shorter questionnaire can improve engagement, including those who struggle to concentrate and/or who have literacy needs. We saw this in a response experiment and in comments from interviewers and participants.
- The use of accessible communication tools designed for fieldwork, such as showcards with pictures and 'taking part cards' helped enable some young people to take part (though were perceived by some as 'babyish').
- Additional interviewer training on the experiences of CYP with SEND may have improved participant experience (but did not have any impact on response levels).

The complexity of people's needs and circumstances means that no single survey approach can be inclusive and engaging for everyone. What benefits one person may be unhelpful to another. Rather, a flexible approach that tailors content and protocols to the individual's needs is likely to improve inclusivity and engagement. However, such an approach contrasts with the usual objective of survey research to collect standardised data in order to ensure comparability.

Who we want to hear from and what we want to know will influence the balance between tailored and standardised approaches. Sometimes an individualised, 'non-standard', approach is necessary, especially for populations for whom a 'standard' survey approach is inaccessible. If we want to design and implement effective, inclusive studies it is crucial to reflect on the need to use a 'non-standard' approach from the outset of the research. Then, once we have reflected on the implications of this, we can use the strategies shared by us and by colleagues in this issue.

NOTE

The SEND Futures Discovery Phase was commissioned by the Department for Education to test feasibility and inform development of a potential future longitudinal study of CYP with SEND and their parents/carers. It was carried out by the National Centre for Social Research in collaboration with the National Children's Bureau.

Trauma-informed practice: why it's important

By Skye Curtis, head of evaluation, MEL Research and Holly Taylor-Dunn, senior evaluation lead, MEL Research

Trauma is a widespread issue affecting millions of people across the country. It can come in many forms, from one-off events such as a car accident (acute), through prolonged exposure such as living with domestic abuse (chronic) or in the form of varied and multiple traumas (complex). Many organisations – including health, policing and education services – are now actively working to understand the impact of trauma on the people they engage with. In Wales, they have made a commitment to being a trauma-informed nation.

As researchers, we now have to think about what being trauma-informed means to us. How do we understand, research and explore trauma-informed practice? We also need to look inwards and ask: how do we create a trauma-informed culture and research practice?

What does it mean to be trauma-informed?

Being trauma-informed means recognising the impact of trauma on individuals and communities and working to ensure that we do not retraumatise people. At MEL Research we work to six principles: safety, trust, choice, empowerment and voice, cultural considerations and awareness, and collaboration (as originally designed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in the US).

As we started to map out how we embed these principles, it became increasingly obvious that to be trauma-informed we needed to consider equality, diversity and inclusion. We needed to understand, recognise and act on experiences of marginalisation and oppression that lead to and exacerbate trauma. We also needed to recognise the importance of trust in all and any research practice, and how this is affected by experience of structural inequalities.

Trauma-informed research as inclusive research

Trauma can come from many sources: abuse, violence, childhood events, ill health, grief, poverty, racism and terrorism. Using an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) lens, we can see that marginalised and oppressed communities often face multiple forms of trauma, such as living in poverty, experiencing racism, and being exposed to community violence. This affects how safe people feel engaging in research and the trust they do or don't have with services and researchers.

As researchers, we have a role in uncovering and collectively interpreting these complex intersectional relationships. We also need to recognise how these experiences affect whether and how people engage with us and our research design. We need to develop community engagement and recognise when there isn't the right trust and safety to genuinely provide people with a voice and choice in research practice.

At MEL Research we've learned to step back from terms such as EDI and trauma-informed, and to start by putting people first. When we think about our research practice, we had to shift from asking 'what is the research question and what data do we need to answer this question?' to exploring:

- what community are we working with, and what are their needs and experiences?
- how can we engage with this community and build trust and partnerships so we can design safe, inclusive and empowering research?
- how do we address power imbalances, and reflect on our own role within the research practice?

Joining the dots – we need to step back and think about research as human practice

Many organisations have EDI objectives and plans, and an increasing number are looking to do the same for trauma-informed practice. However, there is a gap in talking and thinking about how the two agendas need to go hand in hand.

In practice, to be trauma-informed we need to be conscious and considerate of structural inequalities and experiences of marginalisation and oppression. In order to design inclusive research, we need to embed trauma-informed practice – creating safe environments built around the principles of trust, partnership, choice and empowerment. At MEL Research we do this by spending time getting to know people and building relationships before designing data collection. In practice, we have used researchers from the communities we are working with, and we involve people with lived experiences of the topics we are researching.

We have a responsibility to give a voice to people from all communities. We have a dual responsibility to expose and understand these diverse experiences, and to also look inward at our own way of doing things – creating inclusive and accessible research practice where diverse voices and perspectives are heard.

Research participant vulnerability

By Julie Corney, standards and compliance manager, Market Research Society (MRS)

The MRS Codeline advisory service, which advises members on all aspects of the MRS code and guidelines, has noted an increasing trend in enquiries for assistance about vulnerable participants. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this trend began during the pandemic lockdowns, and now continues with participants saying that financial hardship, such as the cost-of-living crisis, is adversely affecting their mental health.

Participant vulnerability is a complex, dynamic state that can affect anyone at any time for many different reasons. All participants are different, with a wide range of needs, abilities and personal circumstances. These differences can place some in a position of vulnerability or greater risk of harm.

Some people's ability to participate effectively in the research may be affected by certain individual characteristics. These can be short-term or long-term, might fluctuate over time, and may not be obvious. Participants may be vulnerable because their competence to give informed consent is uncertain, because socially they are in a position where it is difficult for them to give informed consent, or their circumstances may affect their decision to consent. Additionally, being involved in the research project can also increase participants' potential vulnerability.

Not all the risk factors will be relevant all of the time. The important point is to manage the relevant risks rather than seek to avoid risks involved in researching individuals or populations in vulnerable positions.

Permanent vulnerabilities

Permanent or long-term characteristics could include, for example: people who have learning disabilities or other permanent or long-term disabilities; those on a low income; those with low literacy levels, or communities with cultural barriers to participation. These characteristics can affect large numbers of people.

Fluctuating vulnerabilities

People can be made vulnerable by transitory situations which are not necessarily obvious at first glance. Fluctuating characteristics might include mental health issues; English not being a first language; health problems; location; lack of internet access.

Short-term vulnerabilities

Short-term characteristics causing vulnerability could be related to sudden changes in circumstances like loss of employment or income; bereavement; relationship breakdown; or caring responsibilities.

MRS guidance

The MRS best practice guide and checklist on research participant vulnerability aims to help practitioners identify, understand and respond to research participant vulnerabilities effectively and consistently.

Best ethical practice is reinforced by code rules covering vulnerable people, underlining the importance of our members' professional activities being widely accessible:

- Rule 23. Members must take reasonable steps to assess, identify and consider the particular needs of vulnerable people involved in their professional activities.
- Rule 24. When working with vulnerable people, Members must ensure that such individuals are capable of making informed decisions and are not unfairly pressured to cooperate with a request to participate and that they are given an opportunity to decline to take part.

These rules require members to make every reasonable effort to ensure that their professional activities do not cause harm either to those who have directly participated or, more broadly, to anyone affected by their professional activities. This includes members taking reasonable action to ensure that others do not breach, nor cause a breach of, the code.

Recognising vulnerability

In order to recognise a vulnerable person and their needs, practitioners developing proposals and conducting data-collection exercises should consider if members of the research team know how to recognise vulnerability and deal with vulnerable participants. This includes how to react if any abuse or serious crime is revealed during the data-collection process.

The research team should receive specific training ahead of the project and be periodically assessed on their understanding of any guidance. If the topic of the data collection is sensitive, and it is known or likely that some or all of the participants are potentially vulnerable, ensure that support materials and helpline numbers are available for participants. It may be helpful to contact any relevant support group or charity for their advice before starting the project to identify any potential issues.

If you have any questions about research participant vulnerability, or any other data-collection activity, contact codeline@mrs.org.uk

What is the public sector equality duty (PSED) and why is it important?

By Jasmeet Phagoora, social researcher, Department for Energy Security and New Zero (DESNZ)

What is PSED?

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) is a legal requirement to ensure any organisations delivering public services are considering those with protected characteristics when planning, implementing and reviewing policies and making decisions. These protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion, sexual orientation, sex, pregnancy and maternity, and marriage or civil partnership.

It supports the delivery of more inclusive policies for the public. As well as being a legal obligation, it provides the opportunity to ensure policies and programmes are delivering positive impacts as intended and allowing these policies and programmes to also improve their impact.

There are three aims of the general equality duty:

1. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010
2. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
3. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not

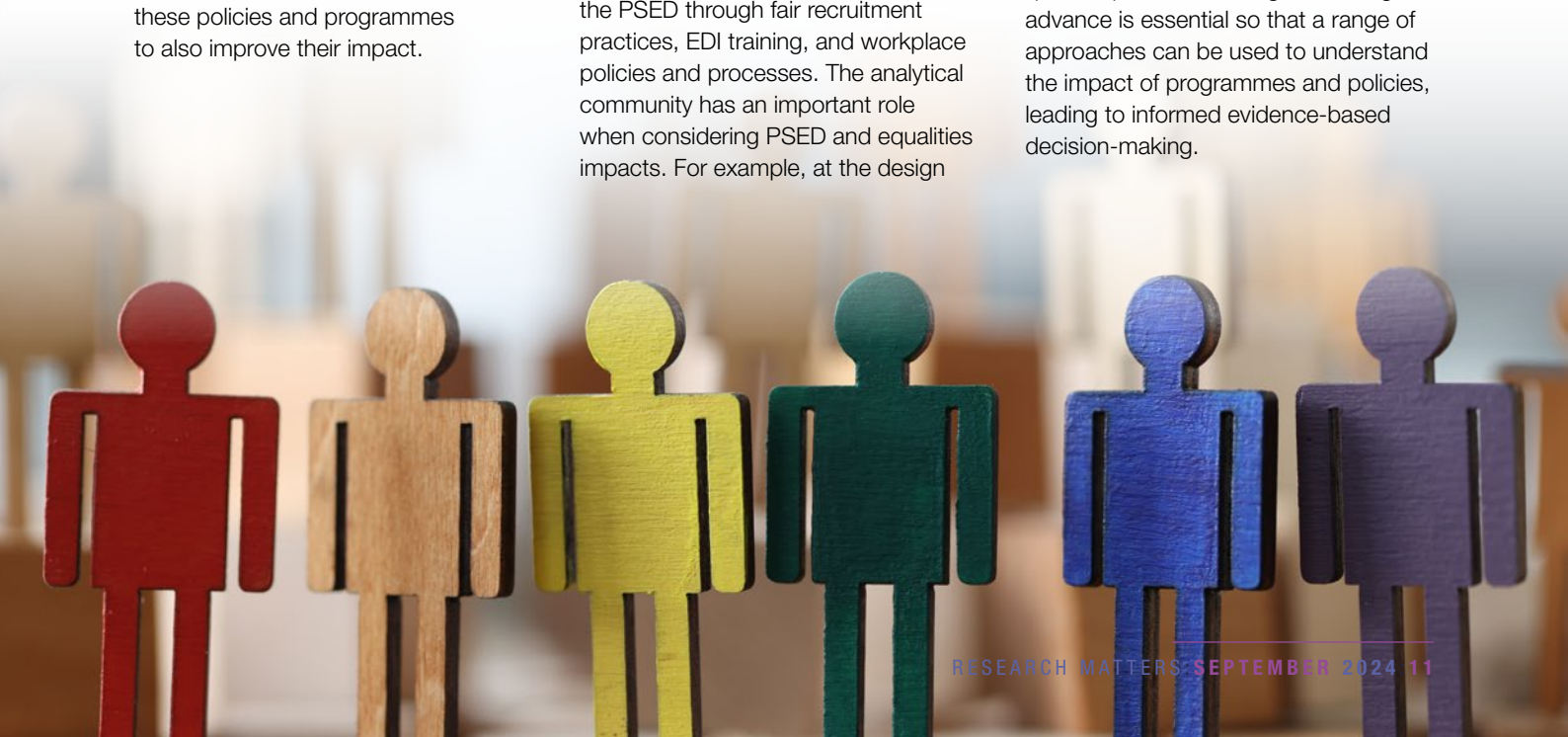
PSED requires equality to be considered in decision-making, the design of policies, delivery of services and, as a result, in public sector research and evaluations.

Embedding the equality duty

Public sector organisations embed the PSED through fair recruitment practices, EDI training, and workplace policies and processes. The analytical community has an important role when considering PSED and equalities impacts. For example, at the design phase of any policy or service, analysts should be considering and assessing any impacts on those with protected characteristics – understanding what data there are, where there may be gaps, and how they can be filled. Evaluation of the implementation and delivery of services should then be conducted to assess what happened (or what is happening) and whether any changes or improvements are required.

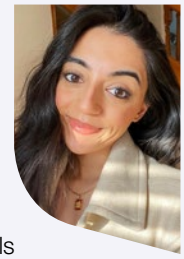
Importance of high-quality social research and evaluation

Some guidance is available for social researchers within the Government Social Research (GSR) profession such as the GSR Ethical Assurance for Social and Behavioural Research. There are various innovative methods we can draw on and use to get meaningful data – from ethnographic research to deliberative approaches to quasi-experimental design. Planning in advance is essential so that a range of approaches can be used to understand the impact of programmes and policies, leading to informed evidence-based decision-making.



The King's Model: addressing health inequalities head on

By Naomi Limbachiya, EDI research coordinator



A recent study found that 83% of Caucasian individuals with Parkinson's disease (PD) receive pain relief, compared to only 48% of Black and 43% of Asian individuals with PD, despite similar pain levels reported.[1] This is one of several accounts of racial inequalities in healthcare, which persist as a major barrier to global health equity. Numerous factors contribute to this issue, but one that has been significantly highlighted following the Covid-19 pandemic is the over-representation of Caucasian individuals in clinical trials.[2] This imbalance raises concerns about the generalisability of clinical trial results to diverse populations, given the variable responses to medications and healthcare interventions across different racial groups. Furthermore, the absence of diverse data contributes to disparities in healthcare access and outcomes, perpetuates the cycle of inequality.

This King's Model, developed by Professor Ray Chaudhuri and colleagues at King's College Hospital (KCH) and King's College London (KCL) aims to address this.[3] The model focuses on three objectives at local, community and management levels:

Local level:

- engage senior executives in EDI strategies
- enhance the diversity of patient and public involvement (PPI) groups
- improve patient communication regarding research
- provide culturally tailored research information
- offer feedback on research outcomes

Community level:

- collaborate with community leaders
- develop a community ambassador programme
- conduct regular focus groups to address research-related barriers and concerns

Management level:

- enhance EDI knowledge among principal investigators
- increase awareness of diversity research within research teams

To achieve its objectives, the King's Model proposes both local (within hospital) and community outreach strategies to increase the participation of ethnic minority groups in research, involving implementing focus groups, conducting seminars and webinars and creating a network of collaboration with those who share similar objectives.

To measure the effective implementation of this model, the MAADE scheme was proposed. This involves:

- **m**onitor: participant ethnicity in research
- **a**cceptability: extent to which flawed assumptions in research are challenged
- **a**ccessibility: equal access to research for all
- **d**rive: trust-wide drive and initiatives for active engagement in research
- **e**xperience: ensuring satisfaction with research participation

On implementing this model amid the challenges posed by the pandemic, the recruitment of ethnic minority participants increased to 16.1% (from less than 2%) in commercial studies, and notably higher to 41% and 59.2% in two distinct non-commercial trials.

Our current work aims to integrate this model across KCH in a sustainable, high impact manner, to ensure all future clinical trial cohorts are more diverse. To achieve this, we have completed a clinical audit across KCH, quantifying the protected characteristics of trial recruits and examining how this information is monitored and stored. Our findings have shown that there is again a significant over-representation of Caucasian clinical trial participants, comprising over 50% of recruits. However, for most studies, the ethnicity data were not available or were difficult to obtain.

We have also investigated the views, challenges and initiatives related to the recruitment of diverse populations among all research delivery unit (RDU) members involved. Our findings indicate that, while most RDU members agree on the necessity of recruiting ethnic minority participants to clinical trials, significant barriers in facilities, pipelines, capacity, and language and cultural barriers, often hinder this recruitment. Nevertheless, individual units were found to be committed to increasing the diversity of their trials through several initiatives. These included covering expenses even when studies do not provide a travel/expense budget, offering out-of-hours research clinics, and scheduling flexible appointments to ensure equal participation opportunities.

These data are now being harmonised to create evidence-based standard operating procedures that encourage the coding, recording and monitoring of protected characteristics throughout various research phases. These procedures will support the personalised implementation of the King's Model according to the specific needs of each RDU.

We hope that, by focusing on the synergy between research and medical care, we can create effective solutions to address these disparities.

[1] https://doi.org/10.1002/mdc3.13430
[2] https://doi.org/10.3233/JPD-213113
[3] https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhip.2023.100426

Impact in the eye of the beholder?

By Fiona McHardy, research and information manager, Poverty Alliance

Working as a research manager within an anti-poverty organisation, the question of 'impact' is one that is never far from my thoughts. In the world of social research, impact is critical to how we measure, evaluate and understand our work.

In practice, determining impact is complex. 'Evidence-based policymaking' and 'evidence into practice' are common expressions but they refer to vague, and often contested, ideas shaped by external drivers such as the political and economic context over which researchers have very little control.

From my own perspective, understanding and measuring impact is a tricky business. Our research and campaigning objectives focus on areas such as income adequacy and our studies span a range of topics and methodological approaches.

Focusing on impact usually results in defining and measuring impact within the fluid worlds of practice and policymaking. This is subjective and complex: how does or can a research team attribute, demonstrate and understand the role that a particular study or evidence has played in a particular field?

It's also important to reflect and consider 'who' we define as important when it comes to impact. By focusing on traditional impact audiences such as government, big business or local authorities, we are also taking a position about our expectation of where power is held, or the contexts in which change happens.

Operationally, when measuring impact, narratives about impact and resource allocations within projects often result in a focus on the stakeholders who are deemed critical, such as policymakers and funders. Measuring impact requires a process of collaboration and redefining traditional expectations. We have been working within the Poverty Alliance to define the concept of impact and to involve research participants in our thinking about research impact and impact activities. In multiple projects, we have worked co-productively to design and think about the ownership of the recommendations and conclusions. In doing so, there is a more open conversation about the parameters and power relations of defining impact.

While there may be similarities in intended audiences, and while traditional stakeholders may continue to hold the levers of change, there is an opportunity to consider other outcomes through co-production. In doing so, there is scope to bring about other ways of thinking about opportunities for impact and change from research.

There will always be areas of consensus and conflict when it comes to measuring and defining impact.

Social research is political, from the very nature of competitive tendering processes to interpreting the data and the subject matter itself. Alongside this, there are the motivations or interests of stakeholders who make use of the evidence. If the reader or user of the work has their own positionality what does that then mean for impact?

Our tale of impact within our work at the Poverty Alliance has been varied. We have examples which would be considered by many in the research community as indicators or barometers of successful impact. This includes an MP citing our findings at Prime Minister's Questions and multiple forms of mainstream media covering a study with critical early insights on the experiences of rising living costs for low-income households.

As examples, these may be seen as impactful due to increased awareness and reach among people with the power to make change and also because there may have been intangible impacts in influencing policy or practice. These forms of impact will always be difficult to measure. However, researchers could open up new ideas about impact by supporting the greater role and recognition of those who participate in social research in the impact process. Without this can we really claim to having impact? Being reflective at all stages of the research process, including of impact, reveals much about the social, political and systemic inequalities that shape our world.

Appreciating Don Dillman

24 October, 1941 to 14 June, 2024

We are sorry about the death of Don Dillman, professor of sociology at Washington State University, and survey methodologist, who contributed significantly to survey research methodology over nearly 50 years. Below are three tributes from those who knew Don well.

Peter Lynn, professor of survey methodology, ISER, University of Essex

I first met Don over 30 years ago, when starting my career – Don was already a giant of survey methods. 'Mail and telephone surveys: the total design method' was a first point of reference for thousands of researchers designing surveys around the world. And yet he wasn't really a survey methodologist. As he proudly told me, he was a rural sociologist who, in conducting surveys of farmers and rural communities, became interested in how best to design his surveys. It was a sideline. But this sideline propelled him into the limelight. He was in great demand as a speaker, adviser or reviewer; a powerful and convincing communicator; and enormously influential in the research community. Many surveys would have been less successful without his insights. The evolution of his book reflects changes in the survey world and in his own thinking. The second edition, in 2000, saw internet replace phone and total design morph into tailored design. The third edition added mixed-mode surveys and had co-authors. The final edition, in 2014, saw phone surveys return to the fold. But aside from his contribution to survey methods (over 200 journal articles and book chapters in addition to the book), Don was also an amiable and supportive colleague, and good company. I will never forget his delight when, while visiting Essex to participate in an international conference in 2006, he realised that the hotel in which he was staying was the same Wivenhoe House that John Constable had painted in 1816. A replica of that painting had hung in Don's house for years. He commented that the scene was largely unchanged, except that the cows of Constable's time had been replaced by rabbits and geese. Don will be missed, though his teachings and legacy will remain with us.

Patten Smith, retired director of survey methods

Survey research has always had its methodological pantheon: experts who command universal respect and reinvent best practice in a changing world. Don Dillman was one of these survey gods – of self-completion survey methods.

I came across Dillman when I was working on the Scottish School Leavers' Survey in 1985 and hoping to find ways of improving (its already excellent) response rates. I read his book and was keen to adopt his methods because he achieved such high response rates. I failed to persuade my colleagues to *totally* 'Dillmanise' our survey. With hindsight, I'm not surprised because Dillman's guidance was totally prescriptive. Adopting all his recommendations would have meant replacing well-established procedures wholesale.

If Dillman's contribution had stopped at this book, he would now be seen as little more than a worthy footnote in the evolution of survey methods. However, this was just the beginning.

Dillman's greatness lies in how he responded jointly to the digital revolution and to new methods of thinking from the 1990s onwards. He both conducted exemplary primary research on web-push methods, and completely revolutionised his recommended good survey practice through the revised versions of his book, and in many lectures and presentations. What began as the total design method became the *tailored* design method, this word-change symbolising the arrival of a rigorous evidence-based flexibility.

Nowadays, if you are serious about conducting a quality survey that has a significant element of self-completion survey data collection, reading Dillman is non-negotiable. He created the gold standard for self-completion survey practice.

Laura Wilson, data collection lead, UK Government Data Quality Hub, ONS

Don's contribution to survey research was immense. We'll be quoting him in decades to come because the principles he taught by will still be relevant. His empathy for respondents and passion for research were infectious.

Someone once described Don to me as 'one of the three heads of the US survey dragon'. While amusing, it made instant sense – he was a legend. I remember, as a junior researcher, seeing him for the first time at a conference and feeling like I'd seen a celebrity. Because of his prestige, I was always nervous presenting in front of him. But Don was never intimidating: he was the opposite. He'd always have time to answer a question, discuss a research challenge or partake in a cheeky debate. Those encounters meant much to me and my fellow researchers.

Don was always open-minded and actively encouraged challenge. He embodied a growth mindset: always wanting to learn and improve things. To quote from one of our correspondences, 'I soon realized that criticism is one of the best compliments you can get, because someone is taking you seriously enough that they tested one or more of your ideas. This is how science proceeds; we have to articulate our ideas and see how people react.'

The global survey community has a lot to thank Don for. It will not be the same without him. Let's ensure we take his teaching and leadership into the future.

Survey Futures award

Survey Futures is a UK Research and Innovation and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded research programme that aims to deliver a step change in approaches to collecting population survey data in the UK.

As part of this project, we have launched the **Survey Futures Early Career Impact Award**, a new initiative designed to celebrate early career researchers and recognise the extraordinary talent, passion and contributions of those working in the UK survey sector today.

Winners of these awards will receive year-long mentoring and opportunities to further support their career via free training and professional recognition.

The six award winners will be invited to a special event, hosted by the Royal Statistical Society in London on **Thursday 17 October 2024 from 1.30 to 5pm**. There they will present their work in front of an audience of colleagues working in survey research, providing an excellent opportunity to build their personal network for the future.

Nominations for the awards are now closed but you can still book a place to attend the event as an audience member.

Thanks to all of those who have endorsed and supported this event to make it happen.

Please share this important event with your networks.

More information and booking.

Titles for review

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

The craft of qualitative longitudinal research

Bren Neale
SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021

Doing qualitative research online – second edition

Janet E Salmons
SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

Doing visual ethnography – fourth edition

Sarah Pink
SAGE PUBLICATIONS LTD, 2021

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

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

Ethical evidence and policymaking: interdisciplinary and international research

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

SRA training

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

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

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 Patricia: training@the-sra.org.uk

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

Evaluation

11 September: Theory-based evaluation: options and choices, with Professor David Parsons

21 October: Foundations of evaluation, with Professor David Parsons

11 November: Research and evaluation project management, with Sally Cupitt

19 November: Impact evaluation (advanced), with Professor David Parsons

27-28 November (2 mornings): Building and using a theory of change, with Professor David Parsons

10-11 December (2 mornings): Theory-based evaluation: options and choices, with Professor David Parsons

12 December: Foundations of evaluation, with Sally Cupitt

Qualitative

13 September: Foundations of qualitative research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

19-20 September (2 afternoons): Creative methods in qualitative data collection, with Dr Nicole Brown

1 October: Introduction to qualitative data analysis, with NatCen trainers

3 October: Introduction to focus groups, with Dr Karen Lumsden

4 October: Narratives and storytelling in qualitative research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

8-9 October (2 afternoons): Creative data analysis, with Dr Nicole Brown

9 October (in person, in London): Interviewing (qualitative data collection), with Professor Karen O'Reilly

10 October (in person, in London): Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

10 October: Cognitive interviewing, with NatCen trainers

11 October (in person, in London): Interpreting and writing your qualitative findings, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

18 October: Narrative analysis, with Dr Karen Lumsden

25 October: Writing up qualitative data, with Dr Karen Lumsden

6 November (in person, in London): Conducting focus groups, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

7 November (in person, in London): Introduction to ethnographic methods, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

8 November (in person, in London): Interpreting and writing your qualitative findings, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

14 November: Reporting qualitative data, with NatCen trainers

18 November: Depth interviewing, with Dr Sarah Jasim

18 November: Introduction to qualitative interviewing, with Dr Karen Lumsden

21-22 November (2 afternoons): Positionality and reflexivity in qualitative research, with Dr Nicole Brown

29 November: Introduction to participatory action research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

5 December: AI-assisted qualitative data analysis, with Christina Silver

16 December: Qualitative data analysis, with Dr Karen Lumsden

19 December: Introduction to qualitative research, with NatCen trainers

Quantitative

18 September: Introduction to quantitative research and analysis, with NatCen trainers

27 September: Introduction to R for social researchers, with Alexandru Cernat

8 October: Imputation for item missing data, Dr Pamela Campanelli

16-17 October (2 afternoons): Web survey design, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

22-24 October (3 afternoons): Cognitive errors in questionnaires and possible solutions, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

23 October: Questionnaire design, with NatCen trainers

12-13 November (2 afternoons): The three stages of weighting probability surveys, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

15 November: Introduction to sampling for social surveys, with Alexandru Cernat

22 November: Data management and visualisation with R, with Alexandru Cernat

Other research skills

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

17 September: Consultancy skills for social researchers, with Dr Simon Haslam

19 September: Writing effective research reports, with Dr Simon Haslam

17 October: Research with children and young people, with Berni Graham

2 December: Introduction to mixed methods research, with Dr Sarah Jasim and Dr Ruth Plackett

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.

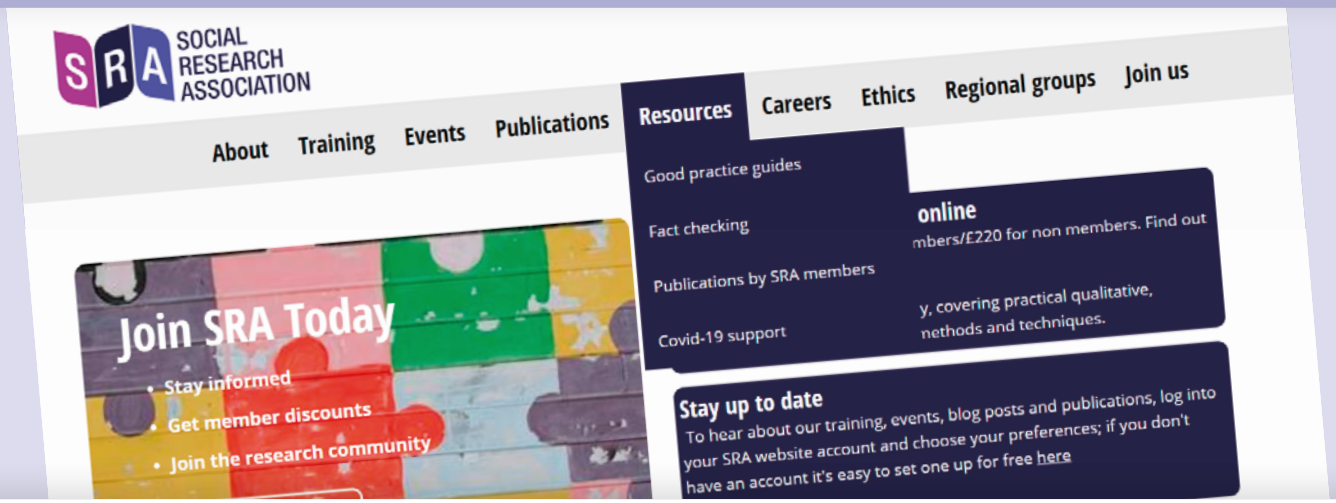
Ethics
www.the-sra.org.uk/ethics

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



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