

research matters



Survey Futures: survey data collection methods collaboration in the UK

By Peter Lynn, University of Essex, director of Survey Futures and Olga Maslovskaya, University of Southampton, deputy director of Survey Futures

The UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has recently commissioned a £3.3m initiative that aims to ensure that it will remain possible in the UK to carry out high quality social surveys of the kinds required by the public and academic sectors. The Survey Data Collection Methods Collaboration (SDCMC), known as Survey Futures, will involve an extensive research programme, a training and capacity building (TCB) stream, workshops, conferences and other events over the next three years (July 2023 to June 2026).

The need for Survey Futures arises both from challenges currently facing the survey community and from new opportunities. Some of the challenges and some of the opportunities were caused or accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic put a temporary halt to in-person interviewing and it was necessary to quickly find new ways to collect data. The pandemic also decimated the interviewer workforce – a setback from which survey organisations are finding it difficult to recover. This came at a time when the public were already becoming more reluctant to participate in social surveys.



A complex network diagram with numerous nodes and connecting lines, rendered in shades of grey and black, set against a light blue background. The nodes vary in size and are interconnected by thin lines, creating a dense web of connections.

There are also knowledge gaps regarding the advantages and disadvantages of different data collection techniques and innovative approaches such as push-to-web, knock-to-nudge and video interviewing, and particularly in the mixed-mode survey context. And there is limited capacity across the sector both of skilled interviewers and of research professionals. Recent developments are leading to changes in commissioner requirements for face-to-face data collection as well as having implications for fieldwork costs and the role of interviewers. In several areas of survey methodology, the need for development of fit-for-purpose methods and the need to identify and communicate best practice is urgent.

Survey Futures is a response to these challenges and aims to deliver a step change in approaches to collecting population survey data in the UK. Outputs will have a strong practical orientation, consisting of good practice guidance for survey design and survey implementation for both survey commissioners and survey data users. This is all backed up by rigorous and well-documented research and with a range of associated activities to ensure that the lessons are disseminated to all relevant stakeholders and, where appropriate, embedded in institutional practice in a timely manner.

Survey Futures seeks to enable a whole community dialogue and collaborative response to the challenges we face. The Survey Futures team includes academic institutions (University

of Essex, University of Southampton, University College London, University of Warwick, University of Manchester, City, University of London, LSE) as well as major data collection organisations (National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), Kantar Public, Ipsos). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) and National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) are Survey Futures' partners. We are also lucky to have international consultants from the University of Michigan (USA), DIW Berlin (Germany) and University of Lausanne (Switzerland). But the breadth of the team alone is insufficient to guarantee success. The collaboration of the entire UK social survey community is needed. It is important that both the activities and outputs are informed by the full range of stakeholders, from funders and commissioners of surveys through to survey data users. Please help! We are setting up forums to discuss both survey practice and TCB. The forums will take place online as well as in person. Please join in and share your views and experiences. In due course, we will also run best practice workshops and an international conference to disseminate and discuss all that has been learned as a result of the Survey Futures research programme and other activities. Your attendance would be most welcome.

Details about Survey Futures, our research programme, the team, and events and other activities are at:

www.surveymfutures.net

What do you think of Research Matters?

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

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



On dancing and soaps

SRA co-chair, Diarmid Campbell Jack on the scale and depth of social research

Welcome to this quarter's Research Matters.

We can all cast our minds back to the strange early days of Covid-19, when pangolins were in the headlines, we quickly discovered R rates of transmission, and data became cool. Well, cooler than normal. Social research quickly adapted to the new situation, with no aspect of our work being harder hit by the pandemic than large-scale surveys, particularly those using a face-to-face approach.

With large-scale surveys remaining a vital arrow in the social researcher's quiver, it's great that this issue of Research Matters features two excellent articles on the issue. In the first, Peter Lynn and Olga Maslovskaya introduce Survey Futures, an extensive programme examining solutions to the challenges to survey design, including those from Covid-19. Laura Wilson takes a different, but complementary angle in our second survey article, outlining the importance of a Respondent Centred Design (RCD) approach to survey development.

Many centuries ago, I had a spell working as a youth worker in central Scotland. I left after two years, having gained a valuable understanding of techno music, Bebo, and how difficult it is to prove the value of community work. Amy Calder's piece in this issue skips over long-deceased social media platforms and bizarrely popular Scottish dance music, instead giving us an excellent introduction to participative research in a youthwork setting, providing an approach that engages young people, develops the skills of youth workers, and encourages genuine reflection. Well worth reading.



If you're anything like me, you'll have spent significant chunks of 2023 careering wildly between wondering if ChatGPT will be the magical solution to those thousands of open-ended answers that stubbornly refuse to code themselves or will lead to a research 'Wild West' where algorithms run amok, ethics are discarded, and our workforce shrinks. Fiona Hutchison, Maciek Ozorowski, and Sam Illingworth provide a fascinating insight into the implications of ChatGPT for social research, including the difficulties of spotting bias and the necessity of transparency.

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I'm delighted that this issue features an article by Lydia Gitamvu on the experience of being a peer researcher. Lydia worked as a community researcher with the Poverty Alliance as part of a project focusing on asylum seekers' experiences of accessing higher or further education. Lydia tells us about the reality of being a peer researcher, including the support and guidance that made a difference, and the challenges. If you're sitting at home on a Tuesday evening and wondering if EastEnders

will really provide you with the intellectual subsistence you require, you could do a lot worse than read the Poverty Alliance's excellent report, [Education is supposed to be free for all](#).

The scale and depth of social research work never ceases to amaze. An excellent example of rigorous research are the mock juries in Scotland run by Ipsos that Rachel Ormston focuses on in her article. Almost 1,000 people took part in 64 mock juries, producing over 50 hours of footage to analyse along with loads of questionnaires. The final study results directly influenced the recent plan by the Scottish Government to remove the controversial third option of a 'not proven' verdict.

Elsewhere in this issue, Faye Gracey provides an excellent summary of the recent Government Social Research conference, with much to consider around inclusive research, collaborative working and even installation theory. Andrew Phelps rounds off the issue reviewing our own SRA conference earlier in this year, which was the usual mix of excellent speakers and workshops combined with great networking opportunities. Of course, this gives me another opportunity to thank, on behalf of the SRA trustees, everyone who attended and those who chaired sessions, spoke, sponsored the event or provided exhibits. And the SRA staff, without whom the conference would not have happened. Thank you all.



Participants and survey research: reflections, opportunities and what's next

By Laura Wilson, Office for National Statistics (ONS), principal researcher in the UK Government Data Quality Hub

Bringing respondents into the process of designing surveys and creating a great survey experience is something that I am passionate about. I am a self-declared 'respondent hugger', so much so that I even ended up co-writing a book on the role of respondents in survey research and development. I also happen to think involving respondents in design is the secret to a successful survey. After all, quality begins at the beginning and, without our respondents, we have no data.



At ONS, we have been taking a Respondent Centred Design (RCD) approach (see [user-centred design](#)) for years to develop some of our surveys. (I've lost count of how many times I have presented on the method since 2016.) However, when we first began that work and started sharing it, we felt quite alone. It seemed that, although respondents were highly valued by everyone, they were not featuring strongly enough in the survey development process itself. Fast forward to 2023 and it's great to see this is changing.

It really hit me when I was at a United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) event last autumn when I saw a whole agenda item focusing on the respondent. That was the first time that I had seen such profile given to the topic, especially in an international setting. It was great to watch attendees pushing for more respondent involvement and acknowledging the importance of doing so. There seems to be a shift

happening across the board in how we think about and treat our respondents:

- ▶ the new [United Nations \(UN\) task force](#) on RCD
- ▶ UNECE events with themes of '[Respondent care](#)' in 2022 and '[Respondents as assets](#)' in 2023
- ▶ National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM)'s new [RCD course](#)
- ▶ survey practitioners across the world embracing RCD: implementing it in their work and sharing it, for example, [Statistics Austria](#) shared its RCD work at this year's European Survey Research Association (ESRA) conference

I think this shift is vital for the future and longevity of surveys – although there is more to do. Surveys are regularly having their role and purpose challenged, such as the recent attempts to replace surveys with administrative data. However, like the Chumbawamba song, 'I get knocked down, but I get up again', the pandemic reinforced how vital surveys are, particularly in their ability to deliver insights no other source can. However, this doesn't mean that we rest on our laurels. In fact, it's the opposite. We need to jump on this reinvigorated profile and respect to evolve and innovate further, ensuring surveys remain relevant and valuable. This is where building on prioritising the respondent comes into play.

Investing in good design and great respondent experiences creates benefits:

- ▶ throughout the data lifecycle
- ▶ to quality overall
- ▶ to the operational aspects of survey delivery

This is increasingly important post-pandemic when we may need to become more reliant upon self-completion modes to collect data while interviewer-led modes struggle to recover.

We are all working to tighter budgets with less resource and shorter timelines. However, we can shift some of our current investment to the design phase. It isn't sustainable to deprioritise respondent experience when respondents are trying to decide between giving us an hour of their time or watching an episode of their favourite TV show which is hosted on a platform that has invested millions on user experience. Surveys are competing for respondents' time, and often coming up short when it comes to user experience.

Thinking about the future of our industry, we need to focus on tailored respondent journeys, inclusivity and accessibility. These aren't featuring enough in discussions, and we need to prioritise and invest in them to improve representation in our data and respondent experience. It was fantastic to see inclusivity mentioned so often in the Survey Futures event in June. [See more on the Survey Futures approach in the front-page article by Peter Lynn and Olga Maslovskaya.] Although these topics fall under RCD, they require specific considerations and solutions. It would be great to come together as a community to raise their profile and to collaborate on potential solutions.

Note: the opinions in this article are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of ONS.

‘Our truth’: my experiences as a peer researcher

By Lydia Gitamvu, community researcher, The Poverty Alliance

From a peer researcher’s point of view, ‘peer research’ is when people with lived experience take the initiative to do research with the support of the person or organisation they choose themselves. Our aim is to solve issues we face. In my case, we were working with the Poverty Alliance, as part of its Rights in Action project, which has been working with community researchers to explore how they could use their human rights to push for change.

The Poverty Alliance made it possible and easy for us to conduct the research. We were given laptops and Wi-Fi routers to help us with internet researching. We were also given travel costs so that we could go to the office and to meetings, and participatory vouchers as a form of thank you for our time. This made me feel valued and seen where often people in my position are unseen and unheard.

We also received media and communication training delivered by the communications officer at the Poverty Alliance. This was fantastic as I never knew there was such a thing. This was one training I would never forget or take for granted – such great insights on how words can make an impact.

Over the next nine months or so, every Tuesday was my special day. I looked forward to it every week and I enjoyed it very much. Every time I was with my peers brainstorming and discussing, I felt like I was doing something meaningful, not only for myself and my kids but for those that are in the same position as I was, and perhaps the next generation. I was treated with a strong sense of decency and compassion. This experience has opened avenues for me to further my education and prompted me to do more for the community.

Being a peer researcher is important because you get to change the narrative. You know that ‘our truth’ is unedited or altered for any political gain. We conducted research on the barriers asylum seekers face when accessing further and higher education in Scotland. The methods used in our research were interviews online and face-to-face focus groups, with the support from the research team at

Being a peer researcher is important because you get to change the narrative. You know that ‘our truth’ is unedited or altered for any political gain

the Poverty Alliance. My highlight was the day we put to bed our findings at an event in Glasgow, as I was elated that we had done it, even if it’s just the beginning of greater things to advance.

Naturally there were some challenges at times. Some were unable to make meetings due to school holidays, childcare and so on. But having a great support system is a game changer because teamwork is truly a dream work and working with a powerhouse like the Poverty Alliance comes in handy because it has resources and influence to make anything happen. It’s simply phenomenal. The Poverty Alliance cares enough to seek justice for all humanity. I’m thankful for the opportunity I was given.

Education is supposed to be free for all – research briefing.



Rights in Action is working with communities across Scotland to raise awareness of how human rights can be used as a tool in the fight against poverty, to increase their capacity to address human rights issues and create a supportive community of practice and to support participatory research projects on human rights issues in Scotland. Rights in Action is funded by the Scottish Government’s Equality and Human Rights Fund, managed and supported by Inspiring Scotland.

Understanding the impact of youth work through participatory research



By Amy Calder, senior policy and research officer, YouthLink Scotland and Kelly McInnes, director, Northern Star

'Through the support of the service and staff I have managed to reach my potential even when at times I had no self-belief that I would get there. Youth work always believed in me and always challenged me to put myself out my comfort zone.' Young person, age 23

Youth work is an informal education practice that supports young people's social, emotional and educational development. It can be universal or targeted, adapted across a variety of settings, and typically engages with young people within their local community.

Though we know that youth work contributes to a wide range of outcomes for young people there has been a lack of evidence to substantiate this, particularly for universal youth work.

Transformative evaluation

To help address this, we have used a participatory, qualitative research methodology called transformative evaluation which was developed by Dr Sue Cooper from Plymouth Marjon University. This methodology involves a reflective conversation between a young person and their youth worker where the young person shares personal reflections of significant changes in their life as a result of participating in universal youth work. The youth worker then adds their commentary and together they form the co-authored significant change stories at the heart of this research.

We have used this methodology in four studies in Scotland with 347 young people sharing their stories. In each of the studies we looked to answer two key questions:

1. What is the impact of universal youth work on young people?
2. How was that impact achieved?

Transformative evaluation was a move to a more participative approach where youth workers were key members of the research team. The methodology provided skill development opportunities for youth workers as well as a space for reflective practice. The significant change stories were rich and benefited from the perspective of both a young person and their youth worker.

Story collection

Using this methodology, youth workers became practitioner researchers and participated in training on research ethics, the process of collecting the stories from young people and then how to write the commentary to accompany the young person's story. They then identified young people to participate in the research and gathered their stories through a reflective conversation.

Important points to note about data collection:

- ▶ a youth worker with an established relationship with the young person collected the story (not a researcher) – recognising the role of the youth worker in the lives of the young person
- ▶ young people were chosen because their youth worker identified that they had experienced significant change
- ▶ this was a participative methodology that moved away from evaluation which is done to people, to providing youth workers and young people with the space and time to reflect

Coding and analysis

In line with the commitment to participation embedded in this methodology, youth workers coded and analysed the data once collected. This collective participative coding involved supporting the youth workers to draw out the key themes from the stories and to assign codes distinguishing between impact and process (impact on young people and how youth work contributed to these impacts).

What we learned

This methodology provided space for young people and youth workers to reflect on the impact of youth work. In doing so, they highlighted the lifechanging role of youth workers who provide safe spaces, opportunities and fun which help young people develop skills, improve their health and wellbeing and increase in confidence.

Including youth workers as active research practitioners ensured young people shared their stories with workers who they knew and trusted. It enabled youth workers to explore their practice and the difference it made, and ensured that the findings were grounded in the language of young people and the youth workers who support them. The methodology also provided professional learning opportunities for the youth workers to develop research skills that they can use in their practice.

More information on transformative evaluation and the impact of universal youth work studies can be found on the [YouthLink Scotland website](#).



Getting inside the jury room

By Rachel Ormston, research director, Ipsos Scotland

The Scottish jury system

For many of us, our impression of juries and how they work is likely to be based on a combination of '12 Angry Men' and 'The Good Wife'. Relatively few people get to experience jury service directly. Still fewer are aware that the jury model we see most commonly on US and UK television differs substantially from the system in Scotland. Scottish juries are unique in three key respects. They:

1. consist of 15 jurors rather than 12
2. are required to reach a simple majority (that is 8 out of 15), rather than a unanimous verdict
3. choose between three verdicts – uniquely, Scottish juries can return a verdict of 'not proven' in addition to the standard options of 'guilty' and 'not guilty'. 'Not proven' is an acquittal verdict and has the same effect, in law, as not guilty

Ipsos, working with academics at the universities of Glasgow and Warwick, were commissioned by the Scottish Government to lead a groundbreaking study to understand the impact that these three factors had on jurors' decision making.

What happens in the jury room stays in the jury room

Of course, the most obvious way of finding out how juries make their decisions would be to ask actual jurors, or even better to film them. But in most countries, including Scotland, that would also be illegal. So instead, we created a 'mock jury' experiment and made it as realistic as possible.

The mock jury

Over the summer of 2018, 969 members of the public participated in 64 mock jury exercises in Edinburgh and Glasgow. The juries varied in the number of jurors (12 vs. 15); the number of verdicts (that is, whether not proven was available); and the majority required (unanimity or simple majority). Each jury watched a video of either a mock rape trial or a mock assault trial (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxeU-sFzOxQ> for a clip from the assault trial). Jurors completed a brief questionnaire recording their initial views on the verdict, before deliberating as a group for up to 90 minutes and returning a verdict (if possible). After returning their verdict, jurors completed a final questionnaire covering their beliefs about the not proven verdict, views about the deliberation process, and final views on the verdict.

A unique experience

Conducting this study was a unique experience for the research team. We learned new skills, including scriptwriting, casting and acting as 'clerks of court' to the juries. The project relied on the commitment and time of many additional people outside the research team – from the retired judge playing the judge in our trial films, to the security guards working overtime at the high court in Edinburgh while we were filming. The volume and nature of the data generated was both fantastic and challenging – in addition to data from pre- and post-deliberation questionnaires and 'meta-data' on jury outcomes, we had 50+ hours of filmed footage of deliberations to analyse.

Informing policy change

Perhaps the highest profile finding from the research was that individual jurors were less likely to favour a guilty verdict when the not proven verdict was available. This matters as the not proven verdict is highly contentious – organisations like Rape Crisis Scotland had called for it to be scrapped, arguing that it was used disproportionately in rape cases and gave juries in such trials an 'easy out'. Others have disputed this and argued that its removal might undermine access to fair justice. Having independent evidence on its impact was therefore essential for informed discussions on the future of the verdict. The research provided the evidence needed to support consultation and debate on potential reform. And in 2022, the Scottish Government announced its plan to end the not proven verdict.

The findings on how juries deliberated on the rape trial also informed the Dorian Review into serious sexual offence cases and continue to be cited in debate on reform to how these cases are dealt with by the courts.

The full report is at: www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-jury-research-findings-large-mock-jury-study-2/



GSR conference 2023

By Faye Gracey, senior principal research officer, Welsh Government

Over 500 government social researchers from across UK government and devolved administrations flocked to London in June for the annual Government Social Research (GSR) conference, and many more logged in virtually. The event space was packed, and the online conference platform was alive as colleagues seized the opportunity to make connections across the profession. Personally, I was really pleased to have the opportunity to meet researchers from DWP and the College of Policing who have similar interests in data acquisition.



Lord Anthony Giddens (member of the House of Lords) took the stand as the first keynote speaker – if you studied sociology, you may well have read one of his many textbooks. He talked about us being on the ‘edge of history’. He reflected on so many sizeable developments happening in very recent times. From (the dog) Laika being the first being in the world to enter space (a sad story I hadn’t heard before), doctors being able to replace body parts, to every single person in the room now having a smartphone

on them. Social science research is needed to help us understand and navigate the fast-changing world we live in, but looking forward and imagining the world we will be applying evidence in is hard.

Professor Saadi Lahlou (chair in social psychology, London School of Economics), as the second keynote speaker, discussed the multi-layered interventions required for behaviour change. It was quite depressing hearing how we are all essentially in a cage. Everything we do is shaped by affordances (physical), competences (embodied) and institutions (social). He asserted we should not shy away from this, but we can embrace installation theory to help us to achieve policy goals.

Two breakout groups followed, intersected by a networking lunch. I spoke at the communications and partnerships session about the work of Administrative Data Research (ADR) Wales – our Welsh Government and higher education partnership. Taking to the stand and looking out into a large audience (around 150), gave me an unexpected bout of nerves. I hadn’t presented in person since before 2020. I’ve become more accustomed to my comfortable at home set up with multiple screens. Other speakers I connected with during the day said the same.

The breakout sessions shared lots of similar themes. Probably the most common, spoken about frequently in the presentations and Q&A, was the importance of relationships, in very different contexts, and between varied stakeholders, partners and teams. Before I spoke, it was great to hear the Scottish Government and University of Dundee reflections on collaborative working and their cultural and linguistic differences. Then members of the GSR strategy working group gave an overview of the [Inclusive Research Guidance](#) they’ve recently published.

In the afternoon I joined the data linking research breakout session (with around 150 government social researchers). ONS showcased its [cost of living tool](#) and [analysis of ethnicity and income](#). The Ministry of Justice then spoke about the impactful [Data First](#) programme.

Conferences are a really great opportunity to build networks, so I feel really lucky I was able to attend.



SRA conference 2023

By Andrew Phelps, principal research officer, Office for National Statistics

It was a delight to be able to attend the 2023 SRA conference in June at the Royal College of Physicians, the first in-person conference since 2019.

My first SRA conference was way back in December 1997, and I couldn't help but reflect on how much has changed since that point when the SRA had been operating for less than 20 years.

I remember that in 1997 some presentations were still being given on acetate sheets, there was a relatively small number of delegates, and some speakers mentioned alternative data sources, but only as a distant dream for mainstream social research. Many of the qualitative methods we now consider mainstream were only in their infancy.

Now, in 2023, the conference demonstrated that the SRA is as vibrant and diverse as ever. I was struck by how many of the 250 or so delegates were unknown faces to me. I think this is a reflection of how diverse an industry it has become, with a whole array of

different methodologies being applied across different industry sub-sectors.

However, there were still plenty of familiar faces to catch up with, some of whom I had not seen for perhaps 20 years. As well as being able to catch up personally, there were plenty of shared areas of interest to discuss, and ideas to develop together over conversation.

The plenary speakers were top class. My personal highlights being the innovative role-play style talk from Robert Cuffe from the BBC, demonstrating how stressful working as a researcher in the media industry can be (I'm not sure many of us left wanting to be a BBC researcher!), and a talk from Ralph Scott about the use of ChatGPT and large language models more generally to code open-text social surveys responses at scale, that left me thinking that we are likely to hear much more about such innovations in the future.

Another innovation – the [Please do touch](#) exhibition – was a great way

to present creative interpretations of research processes and findings, and have something interactive for researchers. It was pleasing to see how busy ONS's exhibit on the transformed Labour Force Survey non-monetary incentives was, together with so many other materials across the room to investigate.

And on alternative data sources, the distant dream in 1997? Well, it was heartening to see a presentation from Steven Ginnis of Ipsos and Joseph Oxlade of Ofcom presenting on a novel approach to research into online news behaviour that combined passive online measurement (from passive device data), survey research and digital ethnography to provide insight into the true use of online news. How far we have come!



Do you ChatGPT? – implications for social research

By Fiona Hutchison, editorial team Research Matters, Maciek Ozorowski, Ipsos and Sam Illingworth, Edinburgh Napier University (& ChatGPT)



ChatGPT, an advanced large language model (LLM) developed by OpenAI, is a cutting-edge AI technology that engages in interactive conversations with users. It can assist researchers, analyse text, generate responses and simulate human-like dialogue. While its potential is vast, ethical considerations surrounding privacy, bias and participant consent are crucial.

Research Matters editorial team member Fiona Hutchison asked some key figures for their views: Sam Illingworth from Edinburgh Napier University, Maciek Ozorowski from Ipsos, and ChatGPT itself.

What are some use cases of OpenAI in social research?

ChatGPT

‘OpenAI and similar language models can be applied in various use cases within social research. Here are a few examples:

- ▶ **Text analysis:** OpenAI can assist researchers in analyzing large volumes of textual data, such as social media posts, online forums, or interview transcripts. It can identify patterns, sentiments, and thematic trends, providing valuable insights for social researchers studying public opinion, online discourse, or qualitative data.
- ▶ **Survey design and analysis:** Language models like OpenAI can aid researchers in designing survey questions by suggesting alternative phrasings, predicting respondent reactions, or generating potential answer choices. They can also assist in analyzing survey responses, helping researchers identify common themes or extract meaningful information from open-ended questions.
- ▶ **Ethnographic simulations:** OpenAI can simulate conversations or interactions to create virtual ethnographic scenarios. This allows researchers to explore social dynamics, test hypotheses, or analyze human behavior and responses in controlled settings. It can be particularly useful for studying interpersonal communication, social influence, or cultural practices.
- ▶ **Data augmentation:** Language models can generate synthetic data that complements existing datasets, enabling researchers to expand the scope and diversity of their analyses. This can be valuable when working with limited or imbalanced datasets, helping to address issues of representativeness and generalizability.
- ▶ **Hypothesis generation and exploration:** OpenAI can generate hypothetical scenarios or responses based on given input, assisting researchers in generating research hypotheses or exploring alternative viewpoints. It can be used as a creative tool to inspire new research directions or uncover novel perspectives.
- ▶ **Literature review and synthesis:** Researchers can utilize OpenAI to aid in literature reviews and knowledge synthesis. The model can generate summaries of research papers, provide relevant background information, or help in identifying key concepts and relationships within a given research domain.

It’s important to note that while these use cases demonstrate the potential of OpenAI in social research, researchers should approach the technology critically and consider its limitations, potential biases, and ethical implications in their specific research contexts.’

SAM

‘ChatGPT is effective at helping to look for patterns, and so it could potentially be used as a co-coder for qualitative analysis. It would be essential to attribute the model and to account for the subjectivity and positionality of ChatGPT, just as you would have to do for a human coder as well.

For quantitative analysis, such AI tools are powerful. They can potentially take the place of other, expensive software packages, removing the need for multiple licences. Again, though, it is important to sense check all results.’

MACIEK

‘With enough training data, LLMs can be fine-tuned to solve more complex tasks around research.’

Do social researchers use ChatGPT?

MACIEK

‘We have been testing LLMs to better understand possible use cases for market and social research. In June we launched our own version of AI assistant called Ipsos Facto. It leverages technology from OpenAI and Google but, at the same time, provides a safe and secure environment to test applications in research in

compliance with GDPR and ensuring our data does not end up in the public domain. We have so far identified more than 80 possible applications that are being thoroughly investigated. Moreover, some proof of concepts have already been developed, and we recently launched first pilot studies in partnerships with our clients to evaluate the quality of AI assisted research.'

What should I do if a research participant uses OpenAI to generate a response?

SAM

'It is best to be clear about whether and how you want participants to use AI to help formulate their thoughts when responding to a research task or question. Make it clear to them in participant information sheets why this is the case and why you have adopted this approach.'

MACIEK

'If we are talking about fraudulent respondents, trying to use ChatGPT to fast-track survey completion, then we already have protocols in place to be able to identify such respondents and remove them from the sample. These include certain trap questions during screeners to identify AI-generated responses. Additionally, there are tools available to verify verbatim data and assess how likely it is it has been generated by a machine rather than a human.'

What are the ethical considerations for using ChatGBT in researching people?

ChatGPT

'Using ChatGPT or similar language models in research involving people raises several ethical considerations. Here are some key considerations to keep in mind:

- **Informed consent:** Researchers must obtain informed consent from participants before involving them in any research using ChatGPT. Participants should be aware that they are interacting with an AI language model and understand the purpose, risks, and potential implications of their participation.

- **Privacy and confidentiality:** Researchers should ensure that participants' privacy is protected. Care must be taken to handle any personal or sensitive information shared during the interactions appropriately and in compliance with relevant data protection regulations.

- **Transparency and disclosure:** Researchers should be transparent about the use of AI language models in the research process. Participants should be informed that their responses may be generated or influenced by an AI and that the generated outputs may not necessarily represent the views or opinions of the participants themselves.

- **Bias and fairness:** Researchers should be aware of potential biases in the training data used to develop the language model and take measures to mitigate any biases that may be present. They should also be cautious about inadvertently amplifying or perpetuating biases through the prompts or questions provided to the language model.

- **Deception and harm:** Researchers should not use ChatGPT or any language model to deceive or harm participants. It is important to ensure that the research design and interactions with the model do not cause undue distress, anxiety, or harm to the participants.

- **Human oversight and accountability:** Researchers should exercise human oversight throughout the research process. They should actively monitor and review the generated outputs, intervene when necessary, and take responsibility for the ethical implications of the research conducted using ChatGPT.

- **Accessibility and inclusivity:** Researchers should consider the accessibility and inclusivity of using language models in research. They should ensure that the technology does not create barriers for individuals with disabilities or those who may have difficulties interacting with AI systems.

- **Continuous evaluation and improvement:** Researchers should continually evaluate the ethical implications of using language models in research and be open to adapting their practices accordingly. It is important to stay informed about emerging ethical guidelines, best practices, and recommendations for responsible AI research.

Adhering to these ethical considerations helps ensure that the use of ChatGPT in research respects the rights and well-being of participants and upholds the principles of responsible and ethical research.'

MACIEK

'Most of the points ChatGPT has listed are relatively easy to incorporate, but the part about bias and fairness can in reality be quite difficult to assess. One thing is being aware of potential biases in the training data, but controlling for it while using ChatGPT or other LLMs is a completely different challenge. Since AI models are largely 'black boxes', bias can only be observed in the data produced by these models, and it is not necessarily easy to spot.'

What do you recommend for the development of this technology as applied to social research?

SAM

'This is a rapidly evolving field. The most important thing is to be transparent in the way that you are using ChatGPT or other AI tools. Make sure that you adhere to the protocols of research journals, ethical bodies and funding institutes. All participants should be fully informed about how you will be using AI, and exactly how their data will be used.'

MACIEK

'The technology needs to be thoroughly reviewed and its impact on research results accurately assessed. It is likely that existing guidelines and industry standards will need to be updated to account for unprecedented situations being the result of use of this novel technology. This AI transformation needs to be delivered responsibly, ensuring all parties involved in the process are not negatively impacted by this change.'

The practitioner guide to participatory research with groups and communities

1st edition

Kaz Stuart and Lucy Maynard

POLICY PRESS, 2023

Reviewed by Alison McIntyre, research officer, Youth Futures Foundation



Participatory research can be incredibly beneficial for the research project, participating group and the researcher. However, it can also be complex and can raise philosophical and practical challenges such as why should we take a participatory approach to research? What will it bring to this project? Who should participate? Why them? How will we conduct the research together?

This publication takes a sociological approach to answering these questions while remaining rooted in the practical considerations of participatory research in community settings. This truly is a step-by-step guide to participatory research.

In the first chapter the authors introduce participatory research on a conceptual level which is guided by the principle of doing research with people and not on people. The authors frame participatory research as a means of social justice and increased equity. After the theoretical focus of the first chapter, this book flows through the process of building a participatory research project from ideation to dissemination. The seventh chapter 'How to collect data' stood out as extremely useful and well-pitched. Practical suggestions will assist researchers and participants to navigate complex methodological questions. Such topics have the potential to create

tension within any group that possesses varying expertise in research design. However, the authors provide advice about how to navigate collaboration and suggest participatory approaches.

A large proportion of this book outlines the basic framework of any research project. For that reason, I would recommend it to those who are not already professional researchers. It is better suited to practitioners, student researchers or community groups. Each chapter includes a reflection task and suggestions for further reading. These and the extensive glossary make it a very effective beginners guide to participatory research methods.

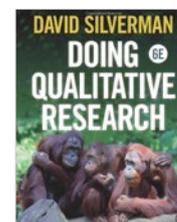
Doing qualitative research

6th edition

David Silverman

SAGE, 2021

Reviewed by Julie Truman, Skills Development Scotland



This is an excellent resource that is so much more than a book. There are links to other resources such as blogs, videos, original academic papers plus exercises and opportunities for collaboration that encourage the reader to think about and engage with the thorny issues that often arise during a qualitative research project.

The book is aimed at students with a particular focus on postgraduate students grappling with their qualitative research. It's a one-stop-shop that

provides a combination of academic references and reflections from personal experiences from PhD candidates from sociological, health, social care, education and crime perspectives. It introduces resources that will help guide readers through their postgraduate research in a logical order, from the first weeks through to oral exam and publication.

The book is written in an engaging, clear way, and challenges the reader to be inquisitive, using a framework

of read, watch, explore, practise, collaborate and apply.

I would not recommend this book for a student who is looking for a highly technical abstract work. Its strength is its accessibility and sound advice illustrated by real life examples.

It will become a well-thumbed companion for anyone committing to qualitative postgraduate research in the social sciences.

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 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

Can you lead the SRA to make sound decisions?

Next year Ailbhe McNabola and Diarmid Campbell-Jack, the SRA's co-chairs, are stepping down from this role, so we are looking for a new chair to continue their good work in leading the board of trustees. Ailbhe and Diarmid will stay on as trustees, allowing good time for a thorough handover.

This is a chance to be part of a supportive and active group of trustees who are ensuring the SRA makes a positive impact on our sector.

The Chair is a trustee who also:

- provides leadership to the organisation and the board
- helps plan and run trustee meetings and the Annual General Meeting of SRA members
- takes the lead on ensuring that meetings are properly run and recorded
- takes the lead on ensuring that trustees comply with their duties and that the charity is well governed
- may act as a spokesperson for the charity
- line manages the chief executive on behalf of the trustees

The SRA is a well-run organisation that benefits from a strong financial position, with a collegiate and supportive trustee group. The key goal for a new chair will be to build on recent work by the trustees in developing a forward strategy and ensuring the SRA continues to deliver on its charitable objectives, making a positive impact for the social research profession.

Required skills and experience for this role are:

- experience of working in the UK research sector
- experience of leading organisational governance, and strategy development
- a good understanding of financial management (although the treasurer is closely involved in this)
- experience of managing senior staff

SRA membership is open to all, and our 1600+ members represent many sectors, research methods and approaches. We welcome applications from across the membership.

[Visit Trustees Unlimited to find out more and to apply for the role.](#)

Closing date for applications: 23 October 2023

Interviews with SRA: 1 November 2023

The selection will be made by a subgroup of existing trustees.

Queries? For an informal conversation about the role, please contact Melissa Baxter at Trustees Unlimited and Russam on **07789 985229** or melissa.baxter@russam.co.uk.

And if you know someone suitable who may like to apply, please encourage them!

SRA training

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

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

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

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

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

Evaluation

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

10 October: Theory-based evaluation: options and choices, with Professor David Parsons

1 November (in person, in London): Theory-based evaluation: options and choices, with Professor David Parsons

2 November (in person, in London): Building and using a theory of change, with Professor David Parsons

6 November: Research and evaluation project management, with Professor David Parsons

12 December: Impact evaluation (advanced), with Professor David Parsons

Qualitative

5 & 6 October: Creative methods in qualitative data collection, with Dr Nicole Brown

6 October: Digital qualitative interviewing, with Dr Karen Lumsden

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

12 October (in person, in London): Qualitative interviewing, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

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

13 October: Foundations of evaluation, with Dr Karen Lumsden

19 & 20 October: Creative data analysis, with Dr Nicole Brown

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

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

1 November: Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

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

3 November: Conducting online focus groups, with Dr Karen Lumsden

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

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

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

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

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

Quantitative

3 October: Understanding statistical concepts and essential tests, with Dr Valerija Kolbas

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

5 October: Introduction to R, with Dr Alexandru Cernat

11 & 12 October: Questionnaire design, with National Centre for Social Research

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

(**Early 2024:** Web survey design and correlation, linear and logistic regression with R)

Other research skills

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

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

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

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

20 November: Consultancy skills for social researchers, with Professor Simon Haslam

30 November: Graphic design know-how for social researchers, with Lulu Pinney

30 November & 1 December (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

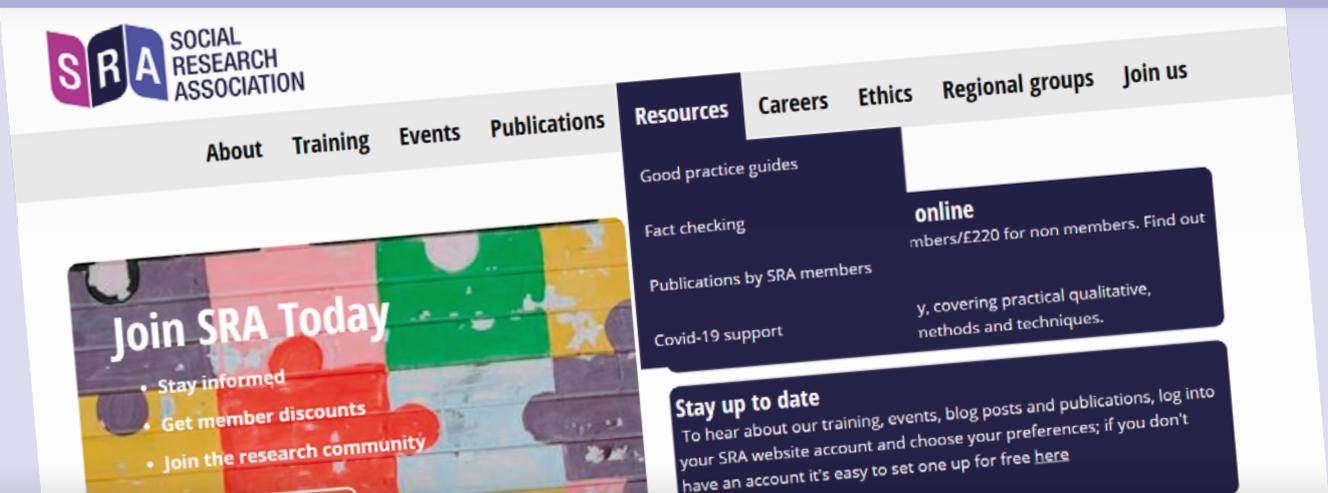
www.the-sra.org.uk/ethics

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.



research matters

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

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