

Qualitative Longitudinal Research: Principles, Practice, Policy
An ESRC funded Seminar Series:

SEMINAR THREE:
USING QL RESEARCH IN POLICY AND PRACTICE
Friday 6th October 2006
Institute of Materials, 1, Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5DB

The final seminar in the series will explore the distinctive contribution that Qualitative Longitudinal research can make to policy and professional practice. Drawing on the perspectives of policy makers and QL researchers, the seminar aims to sharpen our thinking about the potential offered by QL research to 'make a difference' in the real world. Chair: Sue Duncan (Chief Government Researcher, Cabinet Office). Speakers: Anne Corden and Katherine Nice (York); Barbara Doig (Independent consultant, formerly chief researcher of the Scottish Executive); Stephen Farrall (Keele); Jane Lewis (NatCen); Jane Millar (Bath); Anne Power (LSE). Workshop leaders: Fiona Williams (Leeds), Kathryn Backett Milburn (Edinburgh) and Nick Emmel (Leeds).

ABSTRACTS

How can longitudinal qualitative research be used to provide more insight in policy- making and policy evaluation?

Jane Lewis, National Centre for Social Research

My paper will look at why policy-making and policy evaluation needs longitudinal research, and the types of policy insights it can provide. The paper will address what longitudinal research can tell us about the varied contexts - political, organisational, social and personal - within which policies operate, and how this helps us to get a better handle on how policies are working and how their impact might be enhanced. I will reflect on the questions that need to be asked about change, or its absence, to get full value out of qualitative longitudinal data, and draw on some examples from recent studies NatCen has been involved in.

Evaluation of Pathways to Work:

A qualitative longitudinal panel of incapacity benefits recipients.

Katherine Nice and Anne Corden, Social Policy Research Unit, University of York

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'Start with baby steps':

The process of entering & staying in work for lone-mother families

Jane Millar & Tess Ridge CASP, Bath University

There is an explicit commitment in current UK policy to increasing employment rates among lone mothers, with a target of a 70 per cent employment rate by 2010. In recent years there has been a substantial investment in government support for lone parents in work, including a dedicated labour market programme (the New Deal for Lone Parents), increased financial support for those in work (the Child and Working

Tax Credits), and an expansion of childcare services (the National Child Care Strategy). Thus the context in which lone mothers make their decisions about employment – about when and how much to work – has changed quite rapidly. There is much more state support for employment but there is also much more pressure to work, including regular, compulsory ‘work-focussed’ interviews for lone mothers receiving income support.

This research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (RES 00-23-1079), started with in-depth interviews with 50 lone mothers and 61 of their 8 to14-year-old children. The mothers had all left income support between October 2002 and October 2003 and had started working and receiving tax credits. The interviews were carried out between January and June 2004. The families were interviewed again between June and October 2005. At each round, the mothers and the children were interviewed separately, the mothers for about an hour and the children for about 40 minutes. This provides a very rich source of data, revealing something of the complexities and insecurities involved for everyone, not just the mothers, in making the move from ‘welfare to work’ and sustaining work over a longer time period. This paper analyses the role over time of three key potential sources of support: state policy in cash and kind, employers, and family, including in particular the contribution of children in the ‘family-work’ project. We will also reflect on the value of the qualitative longitudinal methodology for addressing policy-related questions and issues.

**The Dynamics of Low Income families:
Insights from a qualitative longitudinal study**

Anne Power, Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion. LSE

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**Helping to Understand How Probation Supervision Aids Criminal Reform:
Longitudinal Qualitative Research in Action**

Stephen Farrall, Keele

Understanding how and why people stop offending and adopt more pro-social identities and behaviours has long been the source of much activity in policy-focussed criminological research. However, attempts to understand how probation officers assist in these processes were hampered by a near-total reliance upon quantitative research strategies. Relying on longitudinal qualitative research helps us to ‘unpack’ the ‘black box’ of probation supervision. Using data collected from almost 200 probationers and their officers, totalling over 1,000 individual interviews, and going back to research started in 1997, I shall demonstrate the value-added aspects of QLR for informing policy-related decision making. These shed new light on the ways in which probation services can assist rehabilitation following criminal conviction.