# Running a peer research project with offenders in the community: A handbook for staff

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Section 1:

# Introduction



## 1.1 About this toolkit

This toolkit is designed for probation staff, and those involved with probation to be able to run a research project with a group of service users. This toolkit was designed by Mike Seal, Principal Lecturer and head of youth and community work at Newman University Birmingham on behalf of the Revolving Doors Agency. It was piloted with two groups of people on probation at Bedfordshire Probation and Hertfordshire Probation.

This guide does not consider issues such as how to sell service user involvement, and the idea of peer research to managers. It assumes that you have already got on board senior management, and have sold the idea of peer research to them. It assumes that you are all ready to go. It should be read alongside:

Service user involvement and offenders in the community: A toolkit for staff

The toolkit gives more detail on how to implement service user involvement and peer research.

## 1.2 What is peer research?

Peer research involves the subject group (in this case those on probation) taking on the role of the researcher. Peer research moves away from 'top down' research where those higher up in an organisation chose the way in which the research should be conducted, towards a 'bottom up' approach where individuals who are directly affected by the outcomes of the research play an active role in the research process.

More information on peer research is available **here**.

There are many benefits of running a peer research project in probation.

**Benefits to running a peer research project in probation:**

- It can help break down barriers in an organisation
- It can add an 'authentic' voice to the findings as the research has been carried out by the target group for the target group
- People on probation may be more inclined to talk to their peers rather than staff members
- It is empowering for the peer researchers
- Peer researchers can gain new skills and experiences, which could influence desistance from crime
- It is an effective way of having user involvement running through your organisation

Section 2:

# Initial considerations for running a peer research project



## 2.1 Who should run the project?

The person running the project should:

- Be an experienced trainer
- Be an experienced group worker
- Have undertaken research themselves, perhaps as an undergraduate

It is a good idea to have someone with an element of neutrality, for example someone who works in a different location or at least someone who is not the offender manager of any of your peer researchers.

There are likely to be a number of people within a probation service who fulfil the criteria. Running a peer research project can be seen as a development opportunity for staff.

## 2.2 Who should participate?

This is largely at your discretion. Use your normal risk management processes. The main criteria is that they would be safe to work in a group and able to undertake interviews with other people on probation.

In the pilots it was not envisaged that participants would be conducting research with anyone under 16 or members of the public, but you might want to consider this depending on the type of research you are undertaking.

Aside from this your criteria for taking people on could be:

- They are prepared to work together as a team
- They are prepared to give their ideas and share experiences
- They can commit to the whole duration of the project

### How many participants

This is again at your discretion. A good size would be anywhere from 5 to 15. There needs to be a balance: a smaller team can be quite effective, but then you also lose the breadth of experience and views, whereas with a bigger team you get this breadth but it can be quite difficult to control.

In piloting, one group began with 7 and decreased to 5 and the other began with 11 and decreased to 9. Both worked in their own ways.

In terms of demographics (gender, race, age, etc.) there is a larger discussion about how this works in terms of research. For your project this will largely depend on who is suitable and available.

An exact balance is not required for the project to run successfully however if a group is completely homogenous then it might become a little skewed. It is also useful to gather the views of those who may be deemed the minority (women, those from a BAME background, etc.).

## 2.3 Indicative budget

The biggest cost of a peer research project is the investment of staff time. To do the project in-house we estimate you will need approximately 20 days of staff time. You may also want to factor in staff time from a second member of staff to support the training.

### Items required for training & duration of the project:

- Lunches for peer researchers
- Tea, coffee, biscuits for peer researchers
- Travel expenses for peer researchers
- Childcare for peer researchers
- Phone expenses to keep in touch for peer researchers
- Stationery for peer researchers – folders/notepads

### One-off expenses:

- Focus group lunches & refreshments
- Client travel expenses for focus groups
- Transcribing costs
- Venue hire for event
- Vouchers for peer researcher participation or other incentive

The total spend for our pilots was approximately £2,000 each, not including staff costs.

| Item | High | Low | No. of people | No. of days | High total | Low total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lunch | 8 | 5 | 7 | 10 | 560 | 350 |
| Focus group lunches | 10 | 5 | 10 | 3 | 300 | 150 |
| Client travel | 10 | 3 | 7 | 15 | 1,050 | 315 |
| Phone | 5 | 0 | 7 | 5 | 175 | 0 |
| Childcare | 42 | 24 | 2 | 15 | 1,260 | 0 |
| Venue hire | 300 | 50 | | 1 | 300 | 50 |
| Transcribing | 300 | | | | 300 | 0 |
| Incentives | 70 | 0 | 7 | | 490 | 0 |
| Grand total | | | | | **4,435** | **865** |

## 2.4 Structuring a programme

Below is a sample programme, although it should not be stuck to – it will depend on context and will evolve as it goes along. There isn't a programme that says exactly what methods you will teach as in a short programme you won't have the scope to do it all; build the programme around what the group wants to research.

A meaningful project of 10-12 days can work, with approximately 4 days training, a day sampling, two days data gathering, two days analysing and a day on dissemination. There will be work in between, but this is the time to meet as a group. However the more time you can dedicate to it, the better.

### Sample programme structure

**Day one: Introductions**
AM: Groundrules, Skills inventory, introductory exercises, Learning Styles
PM: What is research? Paradigms and Methodologies

**Day two: The questions and ethics**
AM: What are our research questions?
PM: Ethics of research

**Day three: Literature reviews and methods**
AM: Literature reviews – what else is out there
PM: Introduction to methods

**Day four: Honing our methods and sampling**
AM: Sampling and validity
PM: Methods design

**Day five: Piloting and getting to the people**
AM: Piloting results
PM: finalising our sampling strategy

**Day six: Data gathering**

**Day seven: Data gathering**

**Day eight: Data analysis 1**

**Day nine: Data analysis 2 and report writing**

**Day ten: Getting it out there**
AM: Report writing and recommendations
PM: Dissemination

## 2.5 Introductory exercises

### 'Getting to know you'

It is a good idea to do several 'getting to know you' exercises. They could also be chosen to illustrate something about research, for example that it can be done creatively and does not have to consist of all surveys and interviews.

One exercise we used in the pilot (that could be duplicated in your probation service) was for the group to draw themselves as an animal, alternatively to draw probation as an animal. This can generate a number of interesting points and ideas, for instance in the pilot one person drew a tiger to represent probation and themselves. They saw probation as a passive animal, but one that was waiting to pounce on you if you did something wrong. They also felt that they had been like that in their life, but positively, they were now waiting to pounce on any opportunities that came their way. It might not be possible to get such a rich description from just asking people a question about what they thought about probation. Alternatively you could get the group to draw probation as a form of transport.

Another exercise is to play the game of consequences (where someone draws a head, then folds it over so the next person can't see it, and they then draw a body on the unseen head, then fold it over for the next person to draw the legs on the unseen head and torso – ending up with a composite picture) the picture could be a researcher, an academic someone on probation or a probation officer/ offender manager.

### Listening skills exercises

It is also a good idea to do a few listening skill exercises. One suggestion is getting the group to separate into pairs and have a conversation about themselves. The pair should then introduce their partner to the group, and see how accurate the description is. The last couple to go often struggle, illustrating how hard it can be to remember things accurately and why it is important to record interviews or make notes as soon as possible after an interview.

## 2.6 Ground rules

Ground rules are important to have, but it is a good idea to discuss them with the group and talk about how they will need to be reviewed and evolve.

People on probation can be familiar with such contracts and can have a level of cynicism about them. The trainer could start by giving their own guarantees which can include not repeating anything they said about probation to the organisation without their permission, or not telling their probation officers/ offender managers about what they had been doing. The only caveat to this would be if they revealed they, or anyone else, had, or were intending to harm themselves or a third person.

An option is to set rules as an organisation, for example in the pilot the only rule that the probation services wanted was that people would not talk about their offences, or expect other people to do so.

Other 'ground rules' in the pilot that can be replicated include:

- Respect for others
- Right to have your own opinion
- To generally not be offensive
- To enjoy the project and be enthusiastic

## 2.7 Skills inventory

Running a few exercises that look at the skills within the group can be very useful. A simple one would be asking them to place themselves on a continuum from good to bad or a variety of skills relating to research. These can include:

- Speaking in groups
- Running groups
- Talking one on one
- Taking notes
- Writing reports
- Creative things (music, drama, creative writing, video making etc. – they had to name them)

To make the group feel comfortable the trainers can introduce themselves as an example. You could then ask the group to pick one area they are not so good at, but would like to improve and use this as a learning action for the group. An alternative is to get them to score themselves on a chart (an example is given below).

### Sample skills inventory

This can then be used as an evaluation tool at the end, with the idea that the spider's web increases in size as their skills and self-confidence do. You can also look at the skills that service users would get out of the experience, asking them to complete the 'so what do we get out of it' survey included in section 11.1 (this is also a useful tool for recruiting people to the project).

In the pilot we offered to write references for the peer researchers (this is not essential but is recommended, as they can also be used as an incentive) and we told the group that the survey would be the basis of any reference we wrote for them.

See Section 11.1 for benefits to peer researchers handout

## 2.8 Learning styles

Everyone has a bias towards one style of learning. This should be noted because trainers will have their own preferences and may well design courses with those in mind. It is advisable to take account of all learning styles and design courses accordingly.

The three main styles of learning are:

1. ***Visual*** – visual people see things in their mind. They will probably enjoy visual images, symbols, designs, and this applies to exercises. They benefit from visual stimulation and will usually respond well to visual imagery exercises. In presentations they understand the point best through pictures and illustrations.
2. ***Auditory*** – Auditory people can 'tune' into new ideas and can 'sound' people out. They learn through talking and can pick up abstract ideas .They can often respond to theoretical ideas well and work out their ideas through speech. They are not fans of experiential exercises, preferring to analyse situations in their own time.
3. ***Kinaesthetic*** – These are people who have a 'feel' for things. They enjoy working with material things and may well pick up new concepts and ideas through a more physical approach. They often understand things through their emotions. In this way they relate to anecdotes in presentations rather than theory. They also respond to experiential exercises rather than more theoretical or analytical ones.

Some people may have a mix of learning styles.

### Identifying which style to use

An idea is to introduce the learning styles to the researchers as a presentation three times, using the different overheads and then encourage people to reflect on which of these styles they found easiest to understand. It will be a mix, but there may be a preference towards one.

Following this you could give the group a really simple task such as making a cup of tea and then ask them to come up with the three different ways of explaining how to do the task, pictorially, in words and via an anecdote or something that evokes feelings. If you want to shorten the exercise split the group into three and ask each one to come up with a presentation/ exercise on one each of the different styles. Then ask each group to present their ideas to the other groups.

See section 11.2 for learning styles handouts

## 2.9 Drafting research questions

There are two approaches when drafting research questions:

1. Start with questions in mind
2. Train peer researchers and then decide on research questions

The latter may seem more suitable but arguably people learn best when they are honing their research questions and working out how to implement them. Therefore a good idea is to start with what the group are interested in researching after looking at the nature of research and the introductory exercises.

People will have ideas about what they are interested in researching, as this is often their motivation for being involved. This provides a starting point; either have open discussion about their ideas or get them to write ideas down individually. You should also look at any previous surveys done of service user opinion. A third source can be to look at what managers want, which means asking them for a sounding. Alternatively you can bring the chief executive in early on to meet people and give their ideas.

For a small project two or three areas, at most, can be realistically explored in research. You need to continually find ways to make the research questions narrow enough to be real. Many changes might not need any resource being invested at all. Small realistic recommendations for change are ultimately better than huge resource intensive recommendations that will not happen.

## 2.10 Piloting

Whichever methods you eventually choose, you need to put aside time to pilot, both the ideas and the questions. Sometimes questions that seem clear to the group actually confuse others. Piloting also gives you opportunities to see if your methods flow. For example in the pilot project it was thought that initial interviews would identify some interesting case studies that could be developed further – which sounds logical, but for some reason it did not work so it had to be reevaluated.

Piloting is also good to see how long interviews actually last, and even how many you will get through in a day. The office may have 100 clients attending in a day, but that does not tell you how many are actually prepared to be interviewed; only experience gives you that.

Section 3:

# The nature of research



## 3.1 What is research?

While this may seem an obvious question it is worth spending time exploring what research is. Start by asking people to react to a piece of research the trainer is familiar with.

In the pilot the piece of research that was looked at was conducted in America looking at the possible link between physical exercise and violence. It measured a group of ice hockey player's incidents of domestic violence towards their partners before a match, and afterwards. It found a much higher level of domestic violence afterwards. It concluded that there is a link between aggression, domestic violence and sport.

Some agreed and said that they always thought there was a link. Others started questioning it saying can you generalise like this, others whether it is true of all sports. Ultimately people's reactions tend to be based not on whether the research is robust or not, but whether they like sport or not, and the research confirms or confronts their prejudices. This is the nature of research, and how people react to it.

Another exercise is to then give people a hand-out which has several quotes about research and ask people which ones they like and dislike. People often like the derogatory ones such as 'there are damn lies and statistics'. You could then have a discussion about how research is used in newspapers and by politicians, often in a selective way, and manipulated, but that research is really trying to get past this. Two positive quotes to follow up with could be:

> ***"Research is simply gathering the information you need to answer a question and thereby help you to solve a problem"***
>
> ***"Social research is about exploring, describing, understanding, explaining, predicting, changing or evaluating some aspect of the social world."***

You could ask people to share the one thing they would change about probation, and after sharing this, get them to recognise that if the research recommends this change that people are likely to react to this in the same way they did the sports research. Some will reject it as they do not like the conclusion therefore it must be done properly and in a way that is seen as valid.

## 3.2 Research paradigms

Although this section is fairly academic and could arguably be missed, it is worth at least some debate, as people will normally associate research with science, which is just one of the ways at looking at the world, and one that may need to be countered. Broadly a paradigm is defined as:

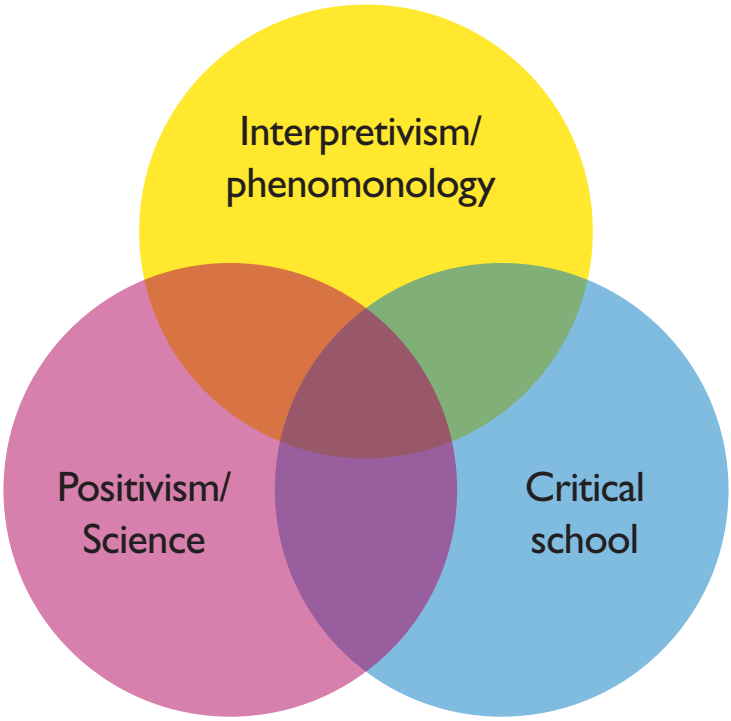
> ***"Paradigms are patterns of beliefs and practices that regulate inquiry within a discipline by providing lenses, frames and processes through which investigation is accomplished."***
> **(Weaver & Olson, 2006, p. 140)**

| Paradigm | What is it? |
|---|---|
| Positivism/ Science | • This has a 'scientific method'<br>• Science believes that there are laws that apply universally about how material things relate to each other that needs to be discovered and formulated<br>• To research this you need to test and measure things and have control groups to show that the things that are being looked at relate to each other and it is not a coincidence<br>• At the end of this process you will be able to make conclusions such as 'if you do this, then this will happen', 'if we mix this liquid with this liquid then it will become/do this' etc. |
| Interpretivism/ Phenomenology | • Interpretative approaches generally explore quality not quantity<br>• They try to understand the rich and deeper resonances behind the topic you are researching<br>• Interpretive approaches do not try to find correlations and make recommendations that are generalisable in every situation<br>• A criticism of this perspective is what is the point of researching it if it will only apply to particular individuals and in particular situations? A counter to this is that by learning about a particular group it will give us a way of finding out about others in a similar position and to understand a particular thing can have value in itself |
| The Critical School | • The critical school says there may be a debate about whether research is generalisable or specific, but if we want to find out meaningful information you must look at the research process itself, and ask who does it and how it is done, in the belief that there are hidden power agendas and silenced voices in research<br>• The idea of peer research comes from the critical school in that it says that clients should be involved in the whole process and that the questions that are to be researched need to come from them, as they are a traditionally silenced voice, and they will create more insightful questions being immersed in the subject in a way a professional researcher will never be |

### *Qualitative vs. quantitative research*

A parallel debate to the one about paradigms is qualitative vs. quantitative research. Quantitative research refers to a group of methods whose main focus is on quantities, that is, numbers. Numbers will usually be the main type of data that these methods collect, and those numbers will be analysed using mathematical or statistical techniques. Researchers using quantitative techniques usually see themselves as doing science. Qualitative studies try to explain social phenomena (like experience and belief) in terms of the wider contexts of people's lives. The data ***that qualitative methods collect tends to be words, rather than numbers, in the form of transcripts, or fieldwork notes***.

In some ways these divisions can be seen as artificial. They can also be seen as on a continuum. An exercise could be to draw or ask people to image such a Venn diagram on the floor in the training room and ask people to place themselves on it according to what they want the research to be.




## 3.3 Methodologies

Methodologies are often seen as the next step down and can sum up the flavour of the approach you are taking. Again the degree to which you go into them with service users is a debate but they are included as much for the trainer to be aware of the overall approach that the group is taking. As Kaplan says they 'describe and analyse methods, throwing light on their limitations and resources, clarifying their presuppositions and consequences' (Kaplan, 1973).

See section 11.3 for methodologies: approaches to research handout

Section 4:

# Literature reviews



## 4.1 What is a literature review?

A literature review is the process of exploring what has already been researched about your topic. This is done to ensure you do not analyse something that has been researched excessively. Also, other similar research might give you ideas, give weight to your argument, or make you refine what you are asking. It can often be disillusioning for people when they find out that ample research has already been done on their topic. However, the research will be unique, as the topic has probably never been researched in your probation service. It also means you can use quotes to back up your findings.

The coming up of your research topic, research questions, and doing a literature review, should be an iterative process:

1. You come up with an initial idea
2. You look at what else has been written
3. You then narrow or expand your question and see what else has been written about the refined questions,
4. You then refine your questions further

You will also return to the literature review at the analysis stage where you look to see whether your findings re-enforce, challenge or give a different angle on what others have said.

## 4.2 Research sources

There are many sources of literature, and many of ways of accessing them. Most reports are on the internet now and even many academic articles and books are freely available. Google and Wikipedia are good places to start. Some academics are reluctant to use Wikipedia although it can be useful; the links at the end of the articles are normally very good. Google also has a more dedicated site for academic research called Google Scholar which will link to the article if it is freely available online. Using too many newspaper articles is not recommended and they can often be very biased and partial, although they may cite a report which you can then go and find. Having said that documentaries are useful tools, and many are on BBC iPlayer and YouTube.

Other useful sites include:
EBSCO: criminal justice
National criminal justice reference service
National offender management service

## 4.3 Scope

Many researchers will come back and say there is nothing out there, and it may be true that no-one has done exactly the same piece of research. However there will probably be something similar if you expand what you are looking for slightly.

For instance there may be nothing on older (35+) BAME women clients' perceptions of self-employment services in your area. However if the criteria is expanded there may be; you could expand the client criteria and look at women clients in general or all BAME clients, or all clients. Alternatively you could expand what they have views on and look at all employment services, or we could expand the area and make it larger.

Conversely you might find there has been a lot of research on your area, particularly if your topic is quite wide such as 'client perceptions of their relationships with their probation officer'. In which case you might want to contract the criteria and make it say women's perceptions, or perceptions of clients in your area, or perceptions of clients of the first month of their relationship.

As an exercise send people out to research what exists on their topic and get them to bring it back and explain it to others so that there can be a group discussion about what this means for your research.

Section 5:

# Ethics

Ethics is primarily about respecting those involved in the research. They can be a set of rules or principles about how researchers should conduct themselves when dealing with participants. There are rarely easy answers with ethical questions. It is a question of creating the right balance.

In both the pilot studies interviewing was undertaken with other clients on probation. We discussed ethical concerns and fears service users may have about being interviewed by other service users, how researchers were going to deal with these concerns. The group then developed a spiel about what they would say at the beginning of their interviews with other clients. There are many codes of conduct for research and more information can be seen in 11.4 and 11.5. However they typically involve certain principles:

- **Voluntary participation:**
  Requires that people not be coerced into participating in research. This is especially relevant where researchers had previously relied on 'captive audiences', like prisons and probation.
- **Informed consent:**
  Prospective research participants must be fully informed about the procedures and risks involved in research and must give their consent to participate.
- **Risk of harm:**
  Researchers should not put participants in a situation where they might be at risk as a result of their participation. Harm can be defined as both physical and psychological. There are two standards that are applied in order to help protect the privacy of research participants.
- **Confidentiality:**
  Participants are assured that identifying information will not be made available to anyone who is not directly involved in the study. A point of discussion for the group is disclosure.
- **Anonymity:**
  The participant will remain anonymous throughout the study – even in some cases to the researchers themselves.

The question then arises of when ethics needs to be applied. You can make the parallel with health and safety and risk assessments. When these ideas were first coined people tended to see them as things to have ticked off, whereas the thinking now is that whatever you do, you need to think of health and safety and risk assessment. This similarly applies to research ethics. Whenever planning, one has to consider questions such as: who this is going to affect, how this is going to affect them, how can we minimise the negative impact on people and what can we do instead if the detrimental effect is too great.

See 11.4 for an ethics exercise handout

Other research areas to pay particular attention to:

- Questionnaires touching on sensitive issues
- Deception
- Experimental procedure that might cause distress- even inadvertently
- Designs involving stressful situations
- Possible breach of confidentiality
- Invasion of privacy
- Working with children
- Working with disabled people
- Work involving animals

Consideration also needs to be paid to what effect publication of the research has for individuals. As an example of this, see the case study provided on the following page.

Case study

### Impact research publication can have

In the sixties a ground breaking piece of research was conducted into men's sexual behaviour with other men. It found that saunas were a place where many men, often married and who considered themselves heterosexual, met other men for anonymous sexual experiences. It was very illuminating in terms of sexual behaviour and led to positive legislation legalising men having sex with men. The researcher was also careful in keeping all names anonymous, including the saunas, and also to change details about individuals such that readers of the report would not recognise their histories even without names. However, it was done in a small geographical area where there were not that many saunas of any kind. The report was cited in several divorce papers because their husbands always went to certain saunas on certain nights and the wives put two and two together. Therefore if publishing any research, consideration needs to be given to anoymising participants, including any names and other identifying factors.

See 11.5 for ethical conduct guidelines

Section 6:

# Reliability, validity, genuineness and authenticity



## 6.1 Introduction

All researchers want their work to be taken seriously, and, for many, to be taken seriously you have to be able to say that your research is objective and replicable (reliability), that you can claim your conclusions from what you did (validity) and you were not biased in who you asked (representative, which we will consider in the sampling section).

## 6.2 Reliability

If a method of collecting evidence is reliable, it means that anybody else using this method, or the same person using it at another time, would come up with the same results. The research could be repeated and the same results would be obtained. Within this there are different types of reliability. While a little technical it is certainly worth the facilitator knowing the difference between them. Further reading is available **here**.

In the case study (1) in 11.6 there is a scenario for the group to consider; you ask the group what is wrong with the conclusions being made. Issues wrong with it include that the evaluation was done at the end of the day when people wanted to go home; it was in a written form when the class is about literacy. There are additional questions such as how it was conducted, on which day etc. that people may bring up. In regard to the issue of validity; it only really represents white women because of who came, and it was a voluntary project which they now want to make compulsory, which is a different dynamic.

## 6.3 Validity

Validity refers to the issue of whether the data collected is a true picture of what is being studied. It determines whether the research truly measures what it intends to and how truthful the results are. This can be complicated because people often want to make grander claims for their data than they should. Validity is also an exercise in logic, as people often want to bring in emotions. Included as an example of this is case study (2) in section 11.6 about single parents, mainly because it is an emotional issue for many, which asks what conclusions can be made from the data given. In fact the only true statement is the last one, no 6. All others are making exaggerated claims.

See section 11.6 for case studies on reliability and validity

## 6.4 Genuineness, authenticity and resonance

Many qualitative researchers question the idea of reliability and validity. One of the concepts of peer research is that the results would differ if another person did it, and that by using peers you get results that are more genuine and authentic. An interpretative researcher would say that the research is not repeatable, representing a particular space and moment in time. You need to ensure and articulate why your results are more genuine and authentic, and while not repeatable, address whether you captured the essence of that moment in time.

Similarly many qualitative researchers criticise the idea of validity, as they do not try to make claims that are generalisable anyway. They also accept that you may come up with results that you did not predict, but are nonetheless interesting. They prefer the term resonance, saying that the research should have resonance with its audience – they can see themselves in it and reflect on it for their own contexts.

Section 7:

# Research methods



# 7.1 Surveys

Most agencies, including probation, have some kind of annual survey of their service users views, which often becomes a statistic of high satisfaction that is quoted in their annual report. However, there are three main criticisms of such approaches:

- Firstly, clients may express high levels of satisfaction because their expectations are low, or they have little to do with it or they do not want to speak badly lest it reflects on the staff they do have a good relations with.
- Secondly, people's experiences are likely to be considerably more complex than whether they are satisfied or not.
- Thirdly, satisfaction questionnaires ***'tend to reflect providers' priorities, when these aspects may not necessarily be what are important to clients in terms of the quality of a service'*** (Seal, 2008).

This goes to show that an effective survey is a difficult thing to construct effectively. We would refer the reader to any basic text on the construction of surveys – do not just take them as a common sense thing to do. Useful websites include:

**http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/survwrit.php**
**http://iss.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/top2.pdf**

If your group decides to undertake surveys there are a few basic ideas you might want them to consider:

## Types of questions

***Yes/no questions***
Useful for when there is only really two choices, often factual e.g. have you ever been to prison. Not useful when there are multiples issues, or a scale of possible answers as it makes for an obvious bias e.g. was your experiences in prison good or bad.

***Multiple choice questions***
Useful to capture different views, but you will always be selective in the choices you offer as they will come from you not them.

***Ranking questions***
This is useful where things are ranked e.g. what are the most common qualities of a probation officer. Again the possible choices will come from you unless you allow them to name some of their own. Do not ask people to rank too much as people may get irritated or find it hard – have a top three or five at most.

***Scaling questions explanation***
Useful for getting opinions where there will be a spread, but make sure there is an even spread of good and bad options. Also if you want a firm opinion do not offer a middle value. It will make people come down one side or another – people also often go for middle values when they are confused, annoyed, or do not care, which may not be what you want to capture.

***Open ended questions***
These sounds good in that you can get people to freely write what they want, but that takes them a lot more time to do and you a lot more time to analyse. Limit it to one main, or two at most, issues, normally at the end e.g. what would be the main thing you would change about probation.

## Ordering of questions and layout

In terms of time the survey should take no more than 15 minutes to finish.

In terms of a general ordering of a survey, a good idea is to begin with factual questions e.g. if you need to know their names, age, gender, etc. Then move onto closed and yes or no questions, asking for their opinions, using scales and ranked questions and finish on an open question, but expect that many will not answer. In terms of a layout, make it clear and logical. Give instructions for questions and have sections (letting people know which they can miss out if they are not relevant to them).

**What to avoid with questionnaires:**

- Leading questions
- Highbrow questions
- Complex questions
- Irritating questions
- Questions that use negatives and double negatives
- Too many open questions
- An imbalance between facts and opinions

From the pilot the peer researchers asked people on probation questions about the reception area. As an exercise we gave the group some questions for them to consider any flaws. A common experience, which can make you or the group consider alternative methods, is that the researcher may ask a closed question but people ignore it and start having a wider discussion. This can happen often when it is around a controversial topic; which we found reception was.

See section 11.7 for survey exercises

## 7.2 Focus groups

Focus groups or group work are useful but need careful consideration. People think it is cheaper to bring people together rather than talk to them individually, but the researcher needs to have the skills of managing a group to make them work. Positively, many people who have been on probation are used to group work. In the pilot we used this approach and the researchers managed the process well. Focus groups bring together people who are in a group for a very short time, typically an hour, and are therefore quite different in nature from an on-going client group. The box below outlines when you might use a focus group.

**Common uses for focus groups**

1. Obtaining general background information about a topic of interest;
2. Generating research hypotheses that can be submitted to further research and testing using more quantitative approaches;
3. Stimulating new ideas and creative concepts;
4. Diagnosing the potential for problems with a new program, service or product;
5. Generating impressions of products, programs, services, institutions, or other objects of interest;
6. Learning how respondents talk about the phenomenon of interest which may facilitate quantitative research tools;
7. Interpreting previously obtained qualitative results

Stewart & Shamdasni (1990)

### Participant selection

This will depend on the purpose of the study and is discussed in more detail in section 8. Stewart and Shamdasani suggest that convenience sampling can be employed, that is, the group must consist of representative members of the larger population (1990, p.53). It is best to over recruit by 20% as some people may not wish to participate or not turn up on the day (Morgan, 1988).

### Size of the group

Most focus groups consist of between 6-12 people. The number of participants will depend on the objectives of the research. For example, smaller groups are preferable when the participants have a great deal to share about the topic or have had intense or lengthy experiences with the topic of discussion.

### Number of groups

Some studies require that several (3-4) groups are convened. According to Morgan, (1988, p.42) one group is never enough as you may be observing the dynamics of that group and little else. However if it is but one of several methods used, then it can work, as was done in both pilots.

## Developing the interview guide for focus groups

### *Questioning route*

This guide should be developed in collaboration with all peer researchers and sets the agenda for the discussion. According to Stewart and Shamdasani (1990), it should grow directly from the research questions that were the impetus for the research. When formulating questions for the interview guide, Stewart and Shamdasani suggest two principles must be considered:

1. Questions should be ordered from the more general to the more specific;
2. Questions of greater importance should be placed early, near the top of the guide, while those of a lesser significance should be placed near the end. (1990: 61).

As these two principles appear to be conflicting, the researcher can start with general questions, move to specific questions and then back to a set of more general questions. The funnel approach (from general to specific) is one way of engaging the interest of participants quickly. Very specific questions about the topic towards the beginning may set the discussion on a track that is too focused and narrow.

### *Number of questions*

Typically a focused interview will include fewer than ten questions; often around five or six. Most interview guides consist of fewer than 12 questions.

### *Types of questions*

Unstructured, open-ended questions are best for focus groups as they allow respondents to answer from a variety of dimensions. Questions must be carefully selected and phrased in advance to elicit maximum responses by all participants.

***"Questions that include words such as how, why, under what conditions, and similar probes suggest to respondents that the researcher is interested in complexity and facilitating discussion"*** (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p.65). However, Kreuger argues that 'why' questions should be rarely used in a focus group as they force participants to provide quick answers that seem rational or appropriate to the situation (1988, p.62).

Some examples of general open-ended questions include:

***"What did you think about the program?"***
***"How did you feel about the conference?"***
***"Where do you get new information?"***
***"What did you like best about the proposed program?"***
(Kreuger, 1988. p.60)

## Conducting the focus group

### *The moderator/interviewer*

The technique of moderating a focus group is a skill in itself where the moderator may have to wear many hats and assume different roles throughout the course of the discussion. Scott, 1987 cited in Stewart and Shamdasani (1990, p.70) states that ***"moderators have the difficult task of dealing with dynamics that constantly evolve...must handle the problems by constantly checking behaviour against attitudes, challenging and drawing out respondents with opposite views and looking for the emotional component of the responses"***.

### *Beginning the discussion*

The moderator must attempt to build rapport in the group. It is a good idea to have group members introduce themselves and tell a little about themselves. This method can help "break the ice". The recommended pattern for introducing the group discussion includes the welcome, overview of the topic, ground rules, then the first question (Kreuger, 1988, p.80).

### *Attributes*

Interviewer attributes may contribute to successful interviews. According to Kreuger, moderators must be mentally alert and free from distraction, anxieties and pressures; should practice the discipline of listening to others in group situations; should memorise the questioning route and should be able to listen and think at the same time (1988, p.75).

Glesne and Peshkin feel that a good interviewer is anticipatory; alert to establish rapport; naive; analytic; paradoxically bilateral (dominant but also submissive); nonreactive; nondirective and therapeutic; and patiently probing (1992, pp.79-85). Time management is another essential skill of the moderator; in particular, noting when a topic has been exhausted and further discussion will yield little new information.

### *Collecting data*

Tape recorders are invaluable for focus group discussions however they are prone to pick up background noises. The microphones and recorder should be set up prior to the interview and should be visible to participants. The moderator must encourage participants to speak one at a time to avoid garbling the tape (Kreuger, 1988). However, Howe and Lewis (1993) suggest that members of the group will need to identify themselves before they speak.

### *Note taking*

The moderator can attempt to make notes or an assistant moderator can try to capture exact phrases and statements made by participants. The consideration here is that the note taking should not interfere with the discussion. Notes should be complete and useable in the event the tape recorder stops working. In addition, Morgan (1988) suggests that regardless of the method of data collection, the moderator should make field notes after each session to facilitate data analysis.

See section 11.8 for focus group exercises

## 7.3 Interviews

### Types of interviews

There are many types of interviews, typically classified as structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Cohen et al: 2000).

### Structured interviews

Typically, structured interviews will have a number of set questions that are asked of everyone.

### Semi-structured interviews

A semi structured interview will have a structure of broad areas that needs to be covered, normally with an opening question to start people off and then prompt questions for certain areas, for when someone dries up, or goes off topic.

### Unstructured interviews

There are two types of unstructured interviews; scheduled and unscheduled. A schedule can be used so the interviewer knows the areas that need to be covered, but they will judge what question to use in the moment. Alternatively, the interviewer will just let the interview develop and judge which direction to go in at the time, sometimes meaning different interviews will cover quite different topics. Both types normally start with a very open question.

### Which type to choose?

Many people initially go for structured interviews because they seem easy, but they can be quite unnatural and mean that interesting discussions are missed – they can also be quite irritating for the interviewee if they do not like the questions or how they are phrased. There is a trade-off between how natural an interview is, the potential for interesting questions, and on the other hand the possibility for bias and ease of analysis. Also the less structured it is, the more skills the interviewer must have to keep it on track.

In the pilot, semi-structured interviews were used with service users and structured interviews were used with staff. Prompts can also be visual as well as written. In one area a prompt for the question of what makes for a good probation officer was a stick person that people could write their answers on – there were also prompts on the stick person such as attitudes, skills knowledge etc. – this very much appealed to the visual learner.

## Learning styles and interviews

Learning styles are important and can be incorporated into interviews, something we will return to in question design. An alternative approach that appeals to those will kinaesthetic styles is called narrative interviewing – where you get people to tell their story, or part of the story relevant to what you are researching, and you pick out themes later. This does not necessarily need to be chronological, as some people do not think like that. Critical incidents analysis (see page 29) asks people to identify particular turning points in their lives (when did you decide to engage with probation, or stop your criminal behaviour), and people can jump back and forth through their life story. Alternatively you can get people to draw their life story or critical incidents – some people respond much more to such techniques.

### Question design

***Open and closed questions***

Commonly a closed question can be answered with either a single word or a short phrase. Thus 'How old are you?' and 'Where do you live?' are closed questions. A more limiting closed question can be answered with either 'yes' or 'no'. Thus 'Are you happy?' and 'Is that a knife I see before me?' are closed questions, whilst 'How are you?' and even 'How old are you?' are not, by this definition, closed. Closed questions have the following characteristics and uses:

- They give you ***facts***
- They are easy to answer
- They are quick to answer
- They keep control of the conversation with the questioner

Although any question can receive a long answer, open questions deliberately seek longer answers, the opposite of closed questions. Open questions have the following characteristics:

- They ask the respondent to think and reflect
- They will give you ***opinions*** and ***feelings***
- They hand control of the conversation to the respondent

They typically use questioning words such as how, when, where. Or they can ask people to explain or expand on something, or give an example. Within interviews they are more common, particularly in your projects, you probably will want people's views on things; otherwise you would have done a survey.

In a half hour you should not have more than 10 structured questions, or four or five areas in a semi-structured interview. Let the questions flow, starting general and getting more specific, akin to focus groups. Discuss with the group about the different questions that could be asked, and start grouping them into themes, and turning closed questions into open ones (not always as easy as you think).

### Common causes of bias in interviews

The most common causes of bias in interviewing are caused by poor sampling, poor rapport between interviewer and interviewee, a tendency for the interviewer to see the respondent in their own image, a tendency in the interviewer to seek answers that support his or her preconceived notions, and misinterpretations about what either party is saying (Cohen et al: Seil, 2008). Using peer researchers will ameliorate some of these issues, but you will still need to have some rehearsals. Conducting a number of role plays with your researchers to get them used to doing interviews would be helpful. Interviews will also normally start with an introduction or spiel, both introducing the project but also going over concerns about confidentiality etc. as we have already discussed.

### Conducting and recording interviews

Ensure interviews are conducted in pairs, both for risk and protection issues, and also for recording.

It is worth going through rules about if someone becomes abusive i.e. that people have the right to walk away, but also on how far people will go in asking personal questions of the interviewer. In the pilot, both groups felt that people could ask questions about their experience of probation, but that issues such as offences were not to be shared – and they also emphasised this for those being interviewed, it was their experiences of probation that they were interested in, not the offences(s) they had committed.

To avoid bias of interpretation and to get real live quotes, interviews should be recorded and transcribed, as well as notes taken. Make sure you get the consent from participants to do this. However, recording interviews is a significant cost factor. An hour's interview takes on average 5-8 hours to transcribe, so time and resources will need to be factored in. It is good practice to get the researcher themselves to transcribe at least a few of the interviews – it helps people get 'familiar with the data' and the emerging themes.

There is no real substitute for getting people to practice interviewing on each other. Get them to come up with their introduction and spiel and try interviewing each other. This is best done with an observer, who could be the facilitator, who then gives feedback, which is invariably more positive than the person who has just done the interview thinks they did. Then get them to swap around.

See section 11.9 for relative merits of different types of interviewing handout

## 7.4 Observation

Sometimes the best way to research something, is not to try and isolate people and ask them about it, as they may not understand it when they are taken out of it, or people say what they think it is rather than what it actually is. The best way to research it is to observe it for yourself.

> ***"We involve ourselves in everyday (and not so everyday) situations; we look at, and listen to, what is happening in the encounter. We try to make sense of what is going on... However, participant observation isn't something restricted to researchers...we all do it to some degree."***
>
> **Smith, 1997**

Smith goes on to describe how he researched the working culture and everyday lives of the workers and customers in his local curry house. When using the method of observation the researcher accepts a role within the social situation he studies: he participates as a member of the situation or group, while observing it. As with any method there are pros and cons:

***Pros***

- You can look at things over time
- You can explore context, relationships
- You can look at things that are hidden and tacit

***Cons***

- It's time consuming
- Note taking can be hard, it requires discipline
- It's subjective
- It can be an ethical minefield

***Ethical concerns***

These different styles also raise significant ethical questions. Peer researchers should consider questions such as:

- How much should I disclose about who I am and what I am doing?
- How do I maintain confidentiality during participant observation?
- How should informed consent be handled for participant observation?

In the pilot the peer researchers initially felt that clients and receptionists should not be told about the observations, because it would affect how they behaved, as they would wish to be seen in a good light. However, it was felt that to not tell them would be unethical, with a compromise that we would not tell either party exactly what we were observing and at what point – it is again the tension between conducting the most genuine and interesting research and remaining ethical.

## Types of observers

It is important to look at the role of observers in relation to the environment being observed, and how the people in the environment understand you. There are four ways of doing this:

- **Complete participant:** where you are, and are seen as, a natural part of the environment, and may or may not tell others that you are conducting research
- **Participant as observer:** where you are accepted as a part of the environment, but are adopting a role as researcher at the same time
- **Observer as participant:** where you have come into the environment as a researcher, who will participate in the environment, but it is understood that your primary role is as a researcher
- **Complete observer:** You do not interact, have come purely as an observer and are understood by all as purely undertaking research

It may be worth debating the pros and cons of these. In the pilot the researchers observed the goings on in reception. The receptionist and other clients were told that they would be doing this (though not always what was being observed), but all parties were used to them being in reception as clients, and still largely related to them in that way, in a way that they would not with the trainer/facilitator. They were being participants as observers, whereas the trainer would have been purely an observer, and potentially would have had more of an impact on people in the environment – it would have been less 'natural'. Unless one is doing pure observation, which seems unlikely and probably undesirable in peer research, then across these approaches the general responsibilities of an observer are to:

- Observe people as they engage in activities that would probably occur in much the same way if you were not present
- Engage to some extent in the activities taking place, either in order to better understand the local perspective or so as not to call attention to yourself
- Interact with people socially outside of a controlled research environment, such as at a bar, public meeting place, bus depot, religious gathering, or market – if casual conversation gives way to more substantive discussion of the research topic, you would need to disclose your identity, affiliation, and purpose
- Identify and developing relationships with key informants, stakeholders, and gatekeepers

## Formal observations

***What do I record?***

Essentially there are two types of observations, ones where notes are taken during the observations and ones where notes are made after the fact, normally called formal and informal observations. With formal observations there may be one or more aspects the observer can be looking for:

- **Physical aspects:** how this is organised and significant
- **Programme aspects:** what is meant to be going on
- **Actor aspects:** who the human actors are: age, gender, role, etc.
- **Interactional aspects:** verbal, non-verbal, formal and informal
- **Human aspects:** how people react to others or situations, or behave
- **Feeling aspects:** what people seem to be feeling
- **Time:** what happens when

On an even more formal scale an observer can chose to numerically note certain events:

- **Event sampling:** how often something happens
- **Instant sampling:** what happens at set intervals
- **Interval sampling:** what happens in set time periods
- **Rating scales:** judgements are made about people's behaviour on a scale

In the pilot, we chose to note how long it took for people to be seen, how long it then took for the Probation officer, how long the interview lasted. We also rated, in terms of politeness, positivity, etc., the reaction clients had to staff and staff to clients and the clients' general mood when waiting and when they left.

See section 11.10 for a formal observations handout

## Informal observations

These are normally longer-term observations or ones where we are not looking for things but trying to pick up on things as they develop. It would normally not be appropriate to make notes on these things as we go along, and even if we do we should normally reflect on them as well. We suggest dividing these observations into two. 'Critical incidents' are specific observations that seem to be of significance to the observer. They do not necessarily need to be dramatic events, but are events, conversations etc. that seem to shed light on, or be of significance, to the research question.

**Critical incidents suggested format:**

- Description of the situation/encounter/ experience that includes some attention to feelings at the time
- Context (keep this short, only a few lines) – briefly summarise what was going on prior to the incident that had an impact. What were the other factors (relationships, lives)?
- Additional material – information that comes to our notice or into our minds after the event
- Reflection – going back to the experiences, attending to feelings and evaluating experience. Walk around the incident, stand outside yourself and look down on yourself, what do you see?
- Things to do – the process of reflection may well lead to the need to look again at a situation or to explore some further area. It may highlight the need to take some concrete actions. In this 'section' of the entry we can make notes to pick-up later

## Journaling

An alternative or complementary type of observation is to have an overview of what happened that will build up over time. This is so that we do not just look at the critical incidents, but also the context and day to day incidents. This may not be used as much in a short term peer research project, they were not used in the pilots, but they are invaluable if your research project is over a stretch of time. They can even be valuable for a few weeks if the observations happen every day. Sometimes what seems to be mundane can gain greater significance later. Klug (2002: 54) has come up with a helpful set of starter questions for an 'end of the day' type of journal:

- As I look back on the day, what were the most significant events?
- In what ways was this day unique, different from other days?
- Did I have any particularly meaningful conversations?
- Did I do any reading? What were my reactions to it?
- How did I feel during the day? What were the emotional highs and lows? Why did I feel as I did?
- Did I find myself worrying about anything today?
- What were the chief joys of the day? What did I accomplish?

- Did I fail at anything? What can I learn from this?
- What did I learn today? When did I feel most alive?

He also suggested that there should be a regular evaluation of the journals, perhaps on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, of what the journals are telling us.

- Are there experiences, situations or understandings that stand out for us? What is it about them that is catching our attention?
- Does what we have written in our journals still 'ring true'? Have we been fully honest and do the interpretations we made at the time still stand up. From our present standpoint and understanding are there things to question in our writing?
- What is missing? Has there been evasion?
- Does what we are writing in our journals relate to what we know of other practitioners? Can we see any connection with any broader theories we have been exploring?

See section 11.12 for a journal handout

## Observation exercises

***Exercise one***

It is best to get people outside to do this exercise. You could get the group into pairs and ask them to complete the flowing task:

- Decide on a physical area nearby that you are going to observe (e.g. canteen, car park, the shops)
- Decide on a broad group of people you are going to observe, or an aspect of behaviour (e.g. women's behaviour or interactions between staff and shoppers, the smokers)
- Decide on whether you are going to interact with the group or not
- Observe the same area, but from different places for 10 minutes – make sure you do not talk to each other in this time
- Come back are discuss the following questions, do not try and reach a consensus, look at the processes of what you did:
  - *What did you observe that was different*
  - *What was the same*
  - *Where you saw the same things, did you interpret the same things differently or the same*
  - *How did you make notes, how did this differ and what impact did this have*
- Agree on one interesting point to bring back to the group, about the process of what you did.

A discussion can then ensue on the differences between what people observe, showing that it is quite a skill to develop, and that it is probably something best done in pairs.

***Exercise two***

To illustrate this further show them the monkey business illusion at

**http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGQmdoK_ZfY**

It is amazing how many people do not spot the gorilla, again illustrating that while you are concentrating on looking for something, you may miss something obvious or significant – it is important that observers retain an open mind, even when formally observing.

# 7.5 Case studies

## What is a case study?

A case study is where you investigate and tell the story of a person, event, situation or even an organisation. The aim is depth of a single instance rather than trying to get a universal picture. They are useful for several reasons:

- They can help us understand complex relationships
- They give us a real feel for how an issue is lived
- They can help us explore the unusual, unexpected or cases when policies or practice don't fit or work
- They can bring out how policy and processes effect real people
- They can give us ideas for further work

One might think that we are looking for a 'typical' case, to illustrate what normally happens, but with case studies we often learn the most from the unusual or exceptional, as they illustrate instances where policies, such as those in probation do not work, and tell us something about who can get marginalised by the most liberal policy, and why.

Limitations

There are, as in all research, limitations to case studies. Typical criticisms are:

- It is very hard to identify which case studies are significant, particularly beforehand
- They are very complex to analyse, or to work out what to analyse
- They can be very subjective
- They are not generalisable in any conventional sense

However while not generalisable, they can 'ring true' and give us ideas and generate theories that we can then test further. They are also very good to illustrate things, particularly for people who learn via an anecdote or example they can latch onto.

## How do we create a case study?

This can be as simple as getting someone to create a story of their life, or a story about a particular aspect of their experience of probation. However in addition to this we can use other data such as looking at the policies and context that surround their story. You can also do follow up interviews to develop people's ideas further, or interview other people who would have an angle on their story or perceptions. If it is a more organisational issue we can use direct observation to supplement what people say. Ultimately case studies are a multi method approach that will try and get a multitude of angles on a particular issue or situation.

They can also develop from other research methods. In the pilot project we used the interviews to identify who had particularly interesting stories to tell about some of the topics we were researching, in our case employment and housing issues.

**Exercise**

A starting point in the pilot was getting people on the training (the peer researchers) to create case studies on themselves, picking one aspect of the research to concentrate on. We then discussed the significance of the case studies for our topics, identifying what other case studies we might be on the lookout for, and also what had helped people write their case studies. For some it was putting it in the third person, for others it was having some prompt questions, such as what happened, what you learnt from it. They are similar to narrative histories in that they do not have to be linear – the trick being to find out what will help people the most in telling the interesting parts of their story.

See section 11.13 for a case study handout

## 7.6 Creative research methods

There are a multitude of different creative methods and a few are named below.

### Creative writing

You could ask people to write a fictional account, based on people they have known, and themselves, or the day in the life of someone on probation, or even a probation officer (this might be used to test the client's perceptions of what a probation officer does). This could also be done as a consequence story, where one person writes one aspect, or time period and then another the next – creating a composite picture. Other people might like poetry – so they could write a poem about their experiences on probation.

### Drama

An expansion of this could be peer researchers and participants, creating a whole play about their experiences. Another version could be forum theatre – whereby a scene is shown, and then shown again, but this time the audience can interrupt the play and try and change what is said, or intervene with someone's actions – the actors then improvise around what has changed, often with a different outcome. Learning and discussion can happen afterwards about what this means, in this case for probation.

### Film and photography

An alternative is that people make a film. An example of this is when working with a group of young people we gave them cameras and asked them to film what street violence meant to them. They interviewed each other, young people, and adults, but also filmed the physical environment around them. It gave far richer data than any interviews would have done.

You can also work successfully with photographs. For example in one circumstance a group of homeless people were given some cameras, and asked to take photos of what 'home' meant to them – this became an individual, and then collective, collage, which they created a narrative for – again it was far more illuminative than some questionnaires would have been.

### Music

Music can be a very interesting medium, and one that some people immediately relate to. When working with a group of young people around street violence they were reluctant to talk about their experiences, but they would gladly create raps about them. We got a rapper to work with them and help them move from quite sexist and sensationalist lyrics to ones that were more meaningful and expressive – they flourished. These then become meaningful data which can be analysed like any text.

### Art

Art can be another medium that people respond to, and participants do not necessarily need to be artistic to take part. In the pilot, we asked the group to draw probation as an animal and we had some really in-depth and worrying images. One person drew a tiger and said that was how they experienced probation, patient, menacing, not giving a lot away, but ready to pounce. They went on to say that they were also a tiger, not being as reactive as they had been, and now ready to pounce on the opportunities that were coming their way, giving some rich data.

### New media

The internet, mobile phones and social networking sites offer a multitude of ways that people can research. Groups of young people have created a wiki together about their experiences of police harassment. Posting a discussion on Facebook can be about a topic and can be a great way of creating data from people you may not even know. Mobile phones can also be a way of collecting information. People may not be prepared to answer a survey, but might respond to a text request. YouTube, Flickr and Twitter can also be good ways of collecting data and reaching a wider audience than would be prepared to talk to you.

## Dance, board games and knitting

Keywords can be taken from interviews then created into an interpretative dance piece and then discussed in terms of people's reactions to it. A group of homeless people have created a board game, based on a cross between snakes and ladders and monopoly, about being homeless for the day, with possible outcomes including having a night in prison, sleeping on the street and getting a night in a hostel. There are also effective projects where a group of refugee women were talking about their refugee experiences while knitting a mural which they then wove their stories into.

## Exercises

The best exercise around this is to let people get creative. For example, asking a group of Masters students to be creative in designing a research method exploring other students' early experiences of coming to university, using only the materials in the class room. One group grabbed the flip charts and got other students to create maps of their journeys in the college, not of where rooms were located, but the ones they actually used, and how frequently. Another found a globe and asked other students to pick a country that was home, and explain why.

Section 8:

# Sampling and access



## 8.1 What is sampling and access?

Once you have decided your method you will need to think of who you are going to speak to (sampling), and how you are going to get to them (access). This is turn begs a number of questions a researcher needs to ask themselves.

### What size sample do you need?

On one level this depends on what your method is and what you are trying to achieve. If you are going for quantitative research then there are quite complicated formulas for working this out. Essentially you want to survey as many of the possible sample as you can e.g. if you want to say something is true for all the people who use your probation then you want to survey every client in your probation. However, you are unlikely to do this. The fewer you speak to, the less representative it is. On the other hand, the bigger the population you want to speak to, the fewer you need to speak to get the same level of accuracy. Section 11.14 gives an example of a table that has worked out these percentages. Be wary of making any judgements based on a population as low as 10, as one different answer means a 10% deviation.

Qualitative samples on the other hand are very different. If you are using a case study then you may have a sample of one, the debate being which case study to use and why. In general, qualitative samples should be large enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered. At the same time if the sample is too large data becomes repetitive and interesting answers become flattened out, eventually becoming superfluous. Sample size should generally follow the concept of 'saturation' (Glaser & Strauss: 1967) – you stop when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation. It is hard to put a number on it. In the pilots we aimed for around 20 and then reviewed it, sticking with 20. We only interviewed 8 probation officers, although we gave more a small survey. It all depends what you are looking for and what you are trying to say.

See Section 11.13 for a required sample size graph

### How representative is the sample?

This depends on who you want to speak to and how you are going to get access to them. There are issues of gender, race, age, class that you might want to factor in. One way is to ensure that you have a sample that is representative of each these e.g. if 30% of clients in probation are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, you could say you need 30% of the sample to be from these backgrounds as well. Alternatively, particularly with small numbers, you can look at when it becomes a problem e.g. we need to speak to at least one man, or one black woman.

This feeds into the issue of how you are going to sample. Are you going to sit in reception and ask all those who come in if they want to be interviewed? What happens if the first 10 people who walk in are white middle class women, or black working class men?

### How are you going to sample?

There are several ways you can sample according to what we want to achieve.

## 8.2 Random sampling

- **Simple:** totally random, we will take every third person on a list of those on probation and ask them to come in to be interviewed. However you can, as the who walks in the door example, end up with strangely unrepresentative samples
- **Systematic:** e.g. one from each probation or clients of each probation officer, again this might give you a spread of opinion, particularly if you are asking about people's probation officers (meaning you'll get a mix of 'good' and 'bad' opinions) but still the client may not be representative.

## 8.3 Purposive sampling

- **Stratified:** e.g. x many men, x many women. This may be more representative in terms of race etc., but not necessarily in terms of experience – you also might miss out on some interesting issues.
- **Convenience:** Who you know – while this might be unrepresentative, at least you know who you are getting. If you are asking difficult questions then it might help you get access as people who know you might be likely to take part.
- **Snowball:** This is where you start with who you know and ask them if they know anyone else who might be interested. There are difficulties here with bias, but again, with difficult questions or difficult to access groups, it can make a lot of sense.

In reality you can mix these sampling techniques. In the pilot clients were randomly sampled as they came in, with an aim to be more selective second time around, although this was not needed in the end.

## 8.4 What are the issues around access?

Access can be one of the biggest factors. In probation this had to be brokered through us, the workers, or through more random sources like reception. Even this can build in bias, as you end up interviewing those who have the time, or those who turn up to their appointments early – which are unlikely to be a representative group. Access to spaces to interview people was very important in this respect. Clients are unlikely to have access to the whole building meaning they will need to be escorted to places and into interview rooms. A big debate in the pilot was around whether we gave people incentives to participate e.g. a free lunch or a voucher. Interestingly, both groups of peer researchers thought offering vouchers and free food would create the wrong motivation for being involved, although a cup of tea or coffee was necessary, which some then viewed as a health and safety issue.

See section 11.14 for a sampling handout

Section 9:

# Data analysis



## 9.1 What is data analysis?

Data analysis is the method by which you look at the data we have collected, and try and work out what it is telling us, what are the emerging themes, and what it means.

## 9.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis analyses numerical data that has been collected from the research. There are plenty of books written on quantitative data analysis and it can be quite a technical exercise.

Most pieces of research in this area would probably be survey based and would be simple percentages (e.g. 30% agreed, 12% strongly agreed), or the most popular answer was x. If you are using low numbers then presenting them can be more meaningful as 100% might be a good response, but less so if you only had a sample of 3. It is then for the team to work out the significance of this.

The other type of statistical analysis you may engage in is when you ask for them to give a figure on something e.g. age, or how many times have you experienced x. Making sense of a set of figures then becomes a challenge. The most commonly used figures used are:

### Average (mean)

This the most obvious figure for many. You add up all the results and divide the total by the number of responses you have got. It is useful for it is a good figure for getting a general sense of things.

However, it can be deceptive. Firstly it might give you a fraction (that is where we get the figure of the average number of children in an average family is 2.4) when such a fraction is not possible. You might say it is closer to 2 than 3, but it is not as simple as this, if you have a few really big numbers it can distort the average. For example the average wage is quoted as around £25,000. However if we take out the top 2% who earn a lot, then the average comes down to about £18,000 which is perhaps closest to what most people earn.

### Mode

An alternative is the mode, which is the figure that appears most often. This is useful when you have discrete answers as a way of eliminating outliers (i.e. strangely big or small figures) e.g. if you asked how many times someone has been on probation you might get a set of answers like: 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 20, 50. The average of this is 8.4 which is distorted, while the mode is 3 which seems more meaningful.

### Median

Another alternative is called the median which is the middle value in a series of values. This is useful where there are no discrete answers or far too many, meaning the mode figure may be too random.

For instance the mode wage in this country is the minimum wage because many companies pay the lowest they can – however this is not a very representative figure. The median wage in this country is about £18,000 a year, which when you are looking at what the normal wage is, is probably closer than the mean or the mode.

There are many other tests, and ways of eliminating outliers, a common one being variance and standard deviation, which are basically measures of how spread out the figures are. Positively, there is a lot written on the internet on how to do this.

## 9.3 Qualitative Data Analysis

Essentially qualitative analysis looks for meanings, patterns and themes in the words you have collected. In many ways this is more difficult than working with numbers, which largely speak for themselves. Here is a plan on how you could proceed:

### Get familiar with the data:

This is perhaps the most important thing. If you had used interviews and then transcribed them, then get the team to read them, then to read them again, and then to read them again. It is for this reason that I would get people to transcribe the data – there is no better way of getting familiar with the data.

### Coming up with themes:

There are three ways to come up with themes in qualitative data, top down, bottom up and sideways:

**1. Top down (thematic analysis)**

***What is it?***

This is probably the simplest, but as it implies, is top down, and in research terms, least close to the data. Being close to the data is an important aim in qualitative data.

***How does it work?***

In top down analysis you come up with the themes you are looking for before looking at the data. This works best if you do interviews that are structured or at least semi-structured. In this case you will have, to a degree, already identified the possible themes in your questions.

You then code the data; look at everything that has been said in the transcripts and code it according to your themes. This is normally done sentence by sentence, or at least paragraph by paragraph. You will probably have sub themes and will code them also.

***Example***

1) Views on what makes for a good probation officer
   a) attitudes
   b) knowledge
   c) actions
   d) other

Any comments about what makes for a good probation officer are them coded 1a, 1b, 1c or 1d.

## 2. Bottom up analysis (grounded)

***What is it?***

Bottom up analysis is the opposite to top down. It says that you shouldn't impose themes beforehand but see what the data says and work from that.

***How does it work?***

Take each paragraph or sentence and see what theme emerges from it, or summarise what it is saying. This generates a lot of codes, but at this point do not worry about trying to group them or rationalise them.

You create as many codes as you can until you 'exhaust' the data. Do this for each paragraph and sentence.

Go back to these summaries and themes to see if there are any commonalities and group them together (axial codes). Look to see if there are any further commonalities within these groupings and bring these together into bigger groupings. You may have to repeat this process several times eventually arriving at major themes and subthemes. Then go back and code the data with these, bearing in mind the original codings.

This can take some time, and certainly a lot longer than top down analysis. It is probably best suited for semi-structured, both forms of un-structured, and conversational interviews, because it is harder to predict the themes beforehand.

## 3. Sideways analysis (discourse analysis)

***What is it?***

A third approach, usually used as a complement to the first two approaches, is to look at the data sideways i.e. to see what lies behind the data, behind what is said, and sometimes, what is not said. This is done to avoid just repeating certain myths and 'stories' that people create, both workers and clients.

***How does it work?***

At a micro level you look at repeated phrases and concepts that did not have detailed exploration. You can look at power dynamics, and assumptions made between researcher and those researched. This can be important in peer research because of its premise that clients will react better, and be more honest, to being interviewed by other clients. In this regard how the people react in the introductory spiels is quite important and may be worth looking at.

Macro-analysis involves looking at the broad cultural currents running through probation and seeing how these map back onto the findings. In the case of the pilot (and possibility when you do yours) the research was being conducted through the period of the privatisation of probation. This had a profound effect, on motivation of the staff, on motivation for the research, on the possible impact the research could have on the new structure, but also as a point of unity between clients and probation staff that this was overall a bad thing. If you are going to do this kind of research, it can be important to transcribe the initial parts of the interviews, as well as the pauses, 'ums', 'ahs' and, if possible, the body language of those concerned (this can be something the note taker in the interview concentrates on).

## Coding

Once you have worked out how you are going to code, you need to physically do it. In the old days this would involve highlighter pens and often a room with every wall covered in interview transcriptions. In some ways there is no better way to get familiar with your data.

Nowadays there is software that can help you with coding, NVivo is one of the more popular, but a free basic version called Weft QDA can be downloaded free **here**. It is also useful to doing things like text searches, making notes on interviews and cross comparing themes.

## Writing up your themes

You then need to start writing up what the analysis means. This begs the question of what goes in and what comes out. One way of working out what is significant is to go back to the numerical data. If a lot of people had a lot to say about a subject then there is some significance there. However it is not all about numbers, there could just be one comment about a particular thing that is illuminative, and it may be because of this that no-one else said it – it is not always a numbers game.

In terms of presentation of themes that are many ways to do this, and to a large degree it depends on your audience and what you are trying to achieve. Outlining a theme, then exploring the sub theme is a useful structure. An illustrative quote is useful, and you need to go back to the literature to see if it backs up, enhances or contradicts what has already been said.

## Making recommendations

Whether to have recommendations is again a debate. Some strict phenomenologists simply present their findings, really strict ones just present their raw data, saying it is for other to interpret it.

Yours, and the clients' motivation might be to effect change. To these ends it is important to balance being realistic with representing people's views. In the pilot we were mindful throughout of this tension – we wanted to change the world, but also recognised that we needed to effect local change – a permanent tension of the idealist and realist. For example, one of our conclusions with regards to housing was that unless this was in place many people were being set up to fail – however, on a strategic and local level, the recommendation was to have inter agency protocols on housing associations taking clients on probation, and recommendations on how to move forward working with the private sector, including awareness raising.

Section 10:

# Dissemination

Dissemination is about how to spread and communicate the messages of your research. There are three major dimensions to consider:

1. Who your audience is
2. The medium you want to get things across to this audience
3. What you want to happen afterwards

## Audience

For this research the audience will probably be a mix of clients, workers, management, other agencies, or even the general public. They will all hear different things in different ways.

## Medium

### *Report*

A report will inevitably have to be produced, probably with recommendations. A standard format is:

- Introduction
- Aims and objectives
- Literature Review
- Analysis
- Recommendations
- References (if there are any)

The report may be changed and submitted, if that's appropriate, to academic and practitioner journals. It is a way to getting out messages to a wider audience. However, there are many other ways of doing it depending on the audience.

### *Leaflets*

In the pilot, as a way of presenting findings about how to get the most out of probation, the group produced a leaflet with ten top tips of how to get the most out of probation.

### *Film*

In one of the groups in the pilot, one of the participants had experience of being a film maker. The group made a video showing how to be a good probation officer, but also illustrating that it is a two way street and that clients having to be willing. It was based on the findings of what made for a good probation officer and how clients could get the most out of probation.

### *ICT*

Other media are websites, blogs and texting. Texting results, particularly if changes are made, is a particularly effective way of getting messages out to clients. It again helps to start breaking down the 'them and us' mentality.

## What happens afterwards?

### *Events*

One of the most important dissemination mechanisms is a launch event for the research. It can have a variety of formats, but in the pilot, we invited senior managers, workers, clients, and members of the boards. I think it is important to invite people at all levels. It is also important to hold some workshops about how to take the recommendations forward.

### *Group to oversee implementations of recommendations*

We would recommend the setting up of a group, including managers, staff and clients, to oversee the implementation of any recommendations.

# Section 11:

# Resources



# 11.1 Handout: So what do I get out of it? (For Peer Researchers)

Based on a number of surveys on the skills required by graduates undertaken by Microsoft, Target Jobs, the BBC, Prospects, etc., here is our summary of the skills which employers are looking for:

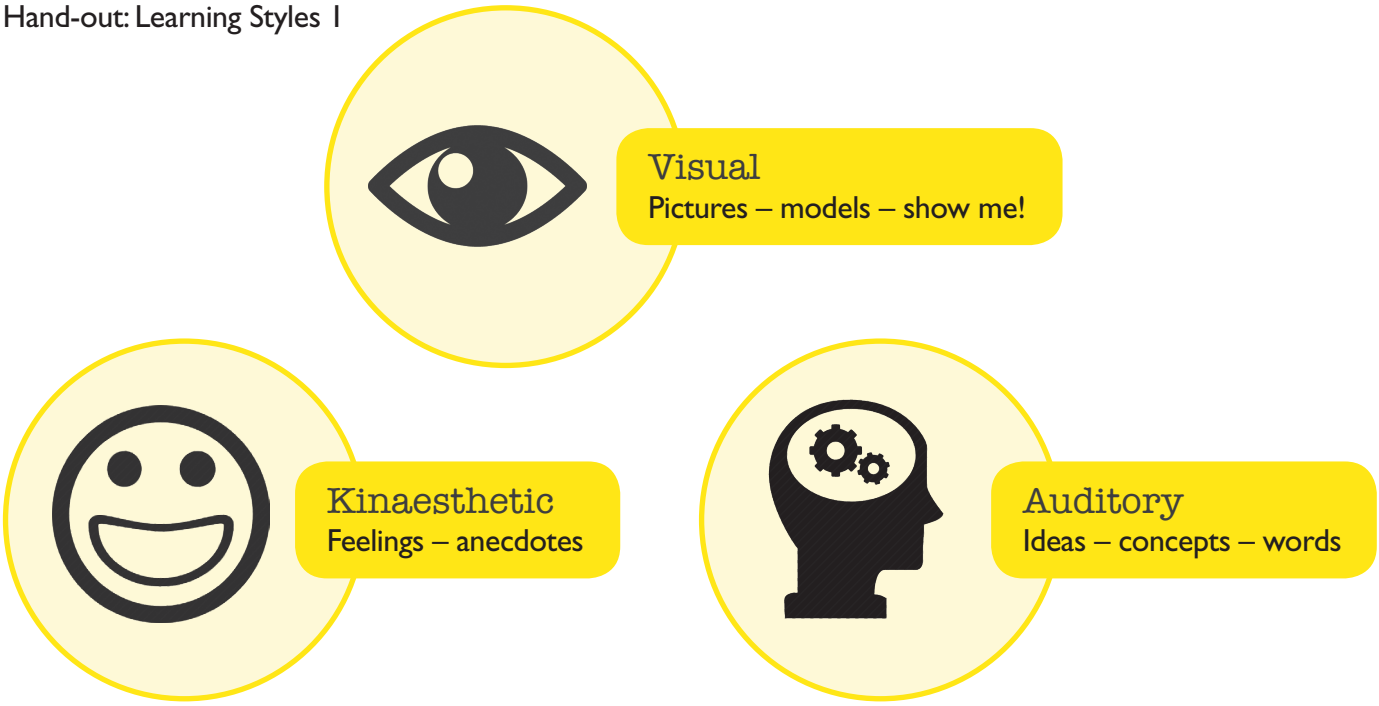
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Verbal communication** | **1** | Able to express your ideas clearly and confidently in speech |
| **Teamwork** | **2** | Work confidently within a group |
| **Commercial awareness** | **3** | Understand the commercial realities affecting the organisation |
| **Analysing & investigating** | **4** | Gather information systematically to establish facts & principles. Problem solving |
| **Initiative / self motivation** | **5** | Able to act on initiative, identify opportunities & proactive in putting forward ideas & solutions |
| **Drive** | **6** | Determination to get things done. Make things happen & constantly looking for better ways of doing things |
| **Written communication** | **7** | Able to express yourself clearly in writing |
| **Planning & organising** | **8** | Able to plan activities & carry them through effectively |
| **Flexibility** | **9** | Adapt successfully to changing situations & environments |
| **Time management** | **10** | Manage time effectively, prioritising tasks and able to work to deadlines |

The skills have links to more background information. This project will:

- Help develop your verbal communication because you will be talking to and listening to other people on probation. There will also be opportunities to deliver presentations to your peers, to staff and to senior management
- Give you concrete experience of working in a team to jointly deliver a project
- Give you an understanding of the commercial environment probation has to operate in
- Develop your analysing and investigating skills and give you concrete examples to talk about
- Be an example of you acting on your own initiative and of your motivation to develop yourself and learn new skills
- Be an example of your drive and your willingness to seek solutions and help make them happen
- Give you opportunities to develop your writing skills, including helping to write the final report and recommendations, or for example to produce new literature for your peers
- Help you with planning and organising your time and be an example of planning and organising a project from start to finish
- Test your flexibility and adaptability! And be an example of how you can work flexibly and in response to changing needs/environments
- Test your time management skills and be an example of how reliable you are. The project is working to a deadline, so if we succeed you can claim credit for that!

## 11.2 Learning Styles

Hand-out: Learning Styles 1




Hand-out: Learning Styles 2

*"When I was a child and my mum was about to give birth, my mum and dad were trying to explain to us three children that this was going to happen. We were too young to remember each other's births as they had been close to each other. They could explain to my brother quite well what was happening in words, explaining birth and pregnancy etc. (auditory).*

*This did not make sense to me until they drew pictures showing the child in my mum and how it would come out and be brought home (visual). For my sister she only understood what was really happening when they reminded her about how she felt when she met her baby cousin for the first time and how they had had to be careful with her but she had liked her and been curious. (kinaesthetic)"*

## 11.3 Hand-out: Methodologies: approaches to research

***Action research***
Practical and problem solving, orientated towards practice and areas where action can then take place. Of necessity involves the practitioner being included in the research, and sometimes the people who are being researched themselves. Often the precise question to be asked develops as the research does.

***Case study***
The study of a single instance or case study rather than of an individual. Primarily based on observation and interview although other methods can be used. While the results often give results only relevant to that particular case they can give us insight into other similar cases e.g. law and precedent.

***Ethnography***
Involves complete or partial integration into the society being studied. Its principal method is participant observation, examining a situation while being a part of it. The researcher attempts to share the experience so as to understand the perspective of the participant.

***Experimental***
Centres on treating different groups of subjects differently and thereby identifying the effects of particular experiences or conditions. In education and social sciences, large numbers are required for all possible variables. There are also ethical issues about having control groups who are effectively denied resources.

***Historical***
Primarily based on the examination of things that have already happened. Methods are normally based on the examination of records, minutes, visual records, letters and some verbal recollection.

***Feminist or Marxist***
This is often a strategy or philosophy of research rather than a method. It criticises research for attempting to be neutral when this actually reinforces that it is male dominated or class biased. Feminist research departs from the underlying assumptions of research theory in a number of ways. It often emphasises the importance of individual experience rather than statistics.

## 11.4 Ethics exercise

### Exercise 1: Gaining ethical approval

If you have time, included is an ethics approval panel exercise based on material done at Huddersfield University. At Universities all research has to be approved by an ethics approval panel where potential researchers have to outline their research, identify any ethical implications it has and show how they are going to mediate the ethical issues – the research is then approved or not. ***N.B. if you are conducting research on NHS premises you need to get ethical approval from central government, which can take some time, your organisation may also have similar issues. Similar rules apply to prisons, you will need to check this when considering your research area***. This can be quite a fun exercise and can get people to go into depth on ethical approval. It can, of course be adapted to research in probation, but it can be good for people to look at a completely different area before they consider their own.

### Introduction

Your task will be to make a recommendation as to whether you think this research is ethically acceptable. To help you make this decision you will have an abridged outline of the British Psychological Society (BPS) guidelines. Your group should read through the guidelines and then discuss the proposed research and assess whether it is ethically sound enough to be approved. Your group should then record its decision and the reasons for it on the Ethics Review Form provided at the end of this hand-out.

As a group you can make one of the following recommendations about the ethical status of the proposal:

- Accept the proposal as it stands as ethically sound
- Accept, subject to minor modifications
- Request major modifications and resubmission
- Reject outright as intrinsically unethical

## Guidance on making a decision

Before coming to a decision about the proposal it is important that your group checks that each of the issues contained in the BPS guidelines are appropriately accounted for in the proposal. It is also important that you consider one further issue which is not explicitly covered in the BPS Ethics Guidelines, but that is considered by most Ethics Committees, that is Researcher Safety. Some notes on ensuring researcher safety have been included for you at the end of the abridged BPS guidelines. A final word of advice: Making ethical approval decisions is always a matter of careful judgement, and not simply ticking boxes for 'right' or 'wrong'. It is likely that you will disagree amongst yourselves on some of the points that arise in the proposal you have been given. The important thing is to try to resolve such disagreements in relation to the principles provided in the guidelines.

**Research Proposal 1:**
**Working in the fast food industry**

***Aims***
To explore the experiences of young people working in major fast food chain outlets.

***Participants***
Twenty people aged between 16 and 25 will be recruited from a cross-section of fast food restaurants in the Aston area. The sample will include 10 males and 10 females, and will seek to include at least five participants from non-white ethnic groups.

***Design***
Semi-structured interviews will be carried out at the participants' workplaces. Interviews will all be taped and transcribed in full. Interviews will cover the following areas:

- Why they chose to work at this restaurant
- Previous experience of working in the fast food industry
- Feelings about colleagues, managers and customers
- What they see as the good and bad points of their work
- Issues of health and safety at work.

***Arrangements for addressing ethical issues***
Potential participants will be given an information leaflet before they agree to take part, and will be asked to sign a consent sheet. They will be told of their right to withdraw from the research at any point. Participants' names will be anonymised in all material arising from the project. Information will be available, should participants request it, on health and safety regulations and other employee rights issues.

**Research Proposal 2:**
**Attitudes of young people with a learning disability to sex**

***Aims***
To explore the experiences and attitudes of young people with a learning disability towards sex.

***Participants***
Twenty people aged between 15 and 21 will be recruited from a cross-section of young people, accessed through a mental health charity in the Bournville area. The sample will include 10 males and 10 females, and will seek to include at least five participants from non-white ethnic groups.

***Design***
Semi-structured interviews will be carried out at the participants' homes. Interviews will all be taped and transcribed in full. Interviews will cover the following areas:

- What their attitudes are towards sex
- What sexual experience they have
- What attitudes have others had towards them being sexually active
- What sex education they think would be relevant to them

***Arrangements for addressing ethical issues***
Potential participants will be selected through, and on the advice of Mind. They will have the project explained to them in conjunction with a worker and will be asked to sign a consent sheet, provided Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA) guidelines say the person is in a position to give consent. They will be told of their right to withdraw from the research at any point. Participants' names will be anonymised in all material arising from the project.

## 11.5 Abridged version of BPS Guidelines for ethical conduct – for use in Ethics exercise

### Harm

1. Researchers must consider the ethical implications and psychological consequences for participants in their research. This means that foreseeable threats to their psychological well-being, health, values or dignity should be eliminated.

### Consent

2. Participants should be informed of the aims of the investigation and all aspects of the research which might reasonably be expected to influence willingness to participate. This should be done before seeking consent.
3. Children or participants with communication or understanding impairments require additional safeguards. Where research involves any persons under the age of 16 years, additional consent should be obtained from parents or guardians.
4. If harm, unusual discomfort or other negative consequences for the individual's future life might occur, the researcher must get the approval of independent advisors, and inform the participants prior to consent.

### Deception

5. Withholding information or providing misleading information is unacceptable if the participant is likely to object once de-briefed. Intentional deception should be avoided whenever possible and never undertaken without advice or for extremely strong scientific or medical justification.

### De-briefing

6. After data has been collected and before the participant leaves the research setting the researcher should provide the participant with any necessary information to complete their understanding of the aims and objectives of the research. Researchers should also discuss with participants their experience of taking part to access possible misconceptions or negative effects.

### Withdrawal

7. Researchers should make it clear to participants at the beginning of the research that they can withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason and request that their data is destroyed.

### Confidentiality

8. Information obtained about a participant is confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance. Participants have the right to expect that if published the information they provide will not be identifiable as theirs. In the event that confidentiality/anonymity cannot be guaranteed participants must be informed before they agree to participate.

### Protection of participants

9. Researchers have a 'primary responsibility' to protect participants from physical and mental harm during the research. Normally the risk of harm must be no greater than in ordinary life. If the risk is likely to be higher than this then the advice of independent advisors must be sought.
10. Participants must be asked about whether they are aware of any risk factors to themselves and advised of any special actions they can take to avoid risk before participation.
11. Participants must be informed how they may contact the researcher, within a reasonable time period, if stress or potential harm related to the research arises.
12. Where the research involves behaviours or experiences which the participant may regard as personal or private, then participants must be protected from stress by all appropriate measures. Participants should be assured that personal questions need not be answered.

### Giving advice

13. If, in the course of the research, the researcher becomes aware of psychological or physical problems that the participant is unaware of, they must inform the participant if the participant's future well-being may be endangered.
14. Caution should be exercised about giving advice to participants about such problems. A further appropriate source of professional advice should be given instead.

## Additional ethical guidelines – non BPS

### Protecting researchers from risk

1. Researchers should assess the risk of physical harm or psychological distress to those carrying out research. They should also take measures to minimise such risks. For example, if research involves interviewing people in their own homes, interviewers should at least carry a mobile phone and inform a colleague or supervisor where they will be and when they expect to be back. If the circumstances are unusually risky – for example, the research is being conducted in a notoriously rough area – the interviewer may need to take a colleague with them, perhaps to wait outside in the car.
2. If there is any risk of psychological distress, arrangements can be made for debriefing of researchers using external support agencies, such as a counsellor. This is especially relevant where the research topic is one likely to be found distressing – such as bereavement, or the effects of violent crime.

## 11.6 Case studies

Case study 1, Reliability:

### Case study 1

You have been running a basic literacy project pilot with a group of probationers. It lasts a whole day and you always have an evaluation at the end of the day just before people go, with a brief questionnaire. It is a voluntary session. And while you normally have a mixed group for the literacy project, it is what is. Predominantly white and female.

***The evaluations say that the project works well and is relevant to people. People rarely have comments on how it could be improved. You think it should be rolled out to all people on probation on a compulsory basis.***

What is wrong with this pilot and the conclusions that have been made about it?

### Case study 2

Research has shown that proportionately more single parents are on benefits than couples. Therefore:

1. If you are a single parent you are more likely to be on benefits
2. Single parents choose to stay on benefits
3. Single parents are more of a strain on the employment budget
4. Single parents are discriminated against in terms of employment
5. If you are a single parent then you are probably going to be worse off financially than families with two parents
6. More research is needed to understand the correlation between single parents and benefit

Are these statements valid, and if not on what basis do they fall down?

## 11.7 Survey exercises

### Survey Exercise 1

***What is wrong with these questions?***

1. Don't you agree that reception is a problem?
2. There are some people who believe that reception is a problem. Are you one of them?
3. Do you agree that reception is a problem and that the management and administration should be working diligently on a solution?
4. What do you think about reception?
5. Have you ever encountered problems with reception? Do you like or dislike your probation officer/ offender manager?
6. On a scale of 1-5 how much do you agree with the statement that reception needs to change
   **1 2 3 4 5**
7. On a scale of 1-4 how much do you agree with the statement that reception needs to change Totally disagree, **2** disagree a lot, **3** disagree slightly **4** agree mostly.

### Survey Exercise 2

***In groups of three***

- Come up with a question you are going to ask people about reception e.g. what do you think about reception's physical area, attitude of staff etc
- Think about the sample you want to use e.g. men, women, staff, clients, ages etc but also how you are going to do this – random, snowball, every third person etc
- Devise 3-5 questions you want to ask them to test your question (open closed, ranked, multiple choice, scaled)
- Go and try them out!
- Come back and discuss it as a group. Identify two things that went well (about sampling or questions) and two things less well (people didn't understand, started disagreeing etc).

## 11.8 Focus group exercises

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **You have a lot to say and will talk over other people** | **You have a lot to say and develop other people's points positively** | **You have a lot to say about the topic but will not talk if other people are dominating** |
| **Pick someone in the group and disagree with everything they say** | **Pick on someone in the group and agree with everything they have to say** | **You have a mate in the group who has lots to say but know they are a bit shy** |
| **You resent being here and are only here because your mates are** | **You are not really interested in the topic and want to mess around** | **You think the facilitator is a bit patronising** |

## 11.9 Relative merits of Different types of interviewing

| Type of interview | Skills needed | Possibility of bias | Potential for interesting answers | Ease of analysis | Naturalness of interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Structured** | Low | Low | Low | Easy | Low |
| **Semi structured** | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| **Unstructured (with schedule)** | High | High | High | Hard | High |
| **Unstructured (without schedule)** | Very high | Very high | Very High | Very hard | Very High |

| Type of interview | Structured | Semi structured | Unstructured (with schedule) | Unstructured (without schedule) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pros** | • It is much harder for the interview to be deflected from the topic in hand<br>• Speedy administration, it provides a relatively quick and easy way of obtaining data<br>• Is economical with the interviewer's time<br>• Respondents may feel more ready to participate given low time/effort commitment<br>• Interviewers need not have all the skills and experience required for unstructured procedures as there is no need to try to think of the next question to ask<br>• Interviews can be replicated. Data are more objectively verifiable. Results can be reviewed (compared and analysed) by other researchers. Results are more generalisable<br>• Reduction of interpersonal bias factors | • The semi-structured interview has the advantages of the structural approach (the form and direction of the questioning is determined in advance), but more flexibility in the interview allows the interviewer to select aspects of the discourse to follow up<br>• Richer and thicker data are obtained by semi-structured interviews<br>• Explanations of wording can be offered when required<br>• Allows for analysis in a variety of ways because it is compatible with many methods of data analysis (discourse analysis, grounded theory etc.)<br>• Easier to arrange than other forms of data collection (fewer logistical difficulties to arrange a series of semi-structured interviews with a small number of participants than to design a longitudinal study) | • Relatively natural conversation produces richer, fuller, more genuine, more realistic information on interviewee's own terms<br>• Enables capture of respondent's construction or unique perspective (interviewees can talk in their own terms)<br>• Not constrained by fixed-answer questions which produce rather narrow information<br>• Interview questions can be adapted to context, interviewee's style and thoughts, and the general flow of answers<br>• Interviewer is allowing the respondent's answers to influence the questioning process<br>• Much more flexible approach to interviewing<br>• Relaxed, more informed and involved respondent | • Conversational interview is highly individualized and relevant to the individual<br>• Conversational interviews are useful in that they are a more natural way of gaining data from participants and have a greater ecological validity than more formal interviews<br>• Likely to produce information or insights that the interviewer could not have anticipated |

| Type of interview | Structured | Semi structured | Unstructured (with schedule) | Unstructured (without schedule) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cons** | • Participant limited to a structured response<br>• Data obtained can be trivial<br>• Narrow range and quality of information gathered, respondents cannot express complexities and subtleties of an issue<br>• Interviewer is prevented from following any new directions for the inquiry<br>• Does not engage participant on a personal level and therefore may feel more like an interrogation than an interview<br>• Social desirability bias – Most people want to present a favourable impression of themselves to other people, and this may lead them to distort their answers to personal questions<br>• Question wordings cannot be adapted to levels of understanding of the respondent | • The advantages of the semi-structured interview, are finely balanced against disadvantages of weak reliability<br>• Still places limits on what is asked and expected of the researchers<br>• Still not fully conversational and therefore might only be appropriate in market research rather than trying to glean information about a personal or traumatic event<br>• Data analysis is time consuming | • Not standardised, differences in procedure could make data comparison less fair and reliable. Difficulties in analysis of wide variety of qualitative information<br>• May not be generalisable, and are not amenable to statistical analysis to test hypotheses<br>• Are costly in time, both for participants and researcher, and therefore may have to be limited in number undertaken during a study<br>• Interviewers may lack some of the skills necessary to conduct interviews successfully – should be able to make an interview seem natural, be sensitive to non-verbal cues, and have well-developed listening skills<br>• May be subject to biases (invalidity and unreliability), both because participants may not tell the truth or may hide aspects of their experiences, and because the interviewer may have an unintended influence on what participants say | • Not standardised<br>• Since different information is collected from different people, they do tend to present more material that may not be relevant to the researchers' aims<br>• This kind of interview is not systematic or comprehensive, and it can be very difficult and time-consuming to analyse the data<br>• Participant can take control of the interview if the researcher does not have proper training or experience<br>• Candidates may also question ethics of the conversational approach |

# 11.10 Hand-out: Structured/Formal Observations

***Physical aspects*** – how this is organised and significant

***Programme aspects*** – what is meant to be going on

***Actor aspects*** – who the human actors are: age, gender, role, etc.

***Interactional aspects*** – verbal, non-verbal, formal and informal

***Human aspects*** – what people do beyond interaction with each other, or as reactions to others or situations

***Feeling aspects*** – what people seem to be feeling

***Time*** – what happens when

***Things to measure***

***Event sampling*** – how often something happens

***Instant sampling*** – what happens at set intervals

***Interval sampling*** – what happens in set time periods

***Rating scales*** – judgements are made about people's behaviour

## 11.11 Hand-out: Journals

### Questions to ask at the end of the day:

- As I look back on the day, what were the most significant events?
- In what ways was this day unique, different from other days?
- Did I have any particularly meaningful conversations?
- Did I do any reading? What were my reactions to it?
- How did I feel during the day? What were the emotional highs and lows? Why did I feel as I did?
- Did I find myself worrying about anything today?
- What were the chief joys of the day? What did I accomplish?
- Did I fail at anything? What can I learn from this?
- What did I learn today? When did I feel most alive?

### Evaluating your journal

- Are there experiences, situations or understandings that stand out for us? What is it about them that is catching our attention?
- Does what we have written in our journals still 'ring true'? Have we been fully honest and do the interpretations we made at the time still stand up. From our present standpoint and understanding are there things to question in our writing?
- What is missing? Has there been evasion?
- Does what we are writing in our journals relate to what we know of other practitioners? Can we see any connection with any broader theories we have been exploring?

## 11.12 Hand-out: Case Studies

### Advantages:

- they help us understand complex relationships
- they give us a real feel for how an issue is lived
- they can help us explore the unusual, unexpected or cases when policies or practice don't fit or work
- they can bring out how policy and processes effect real people
- they can give us ideas for further work

### Disadvantages:

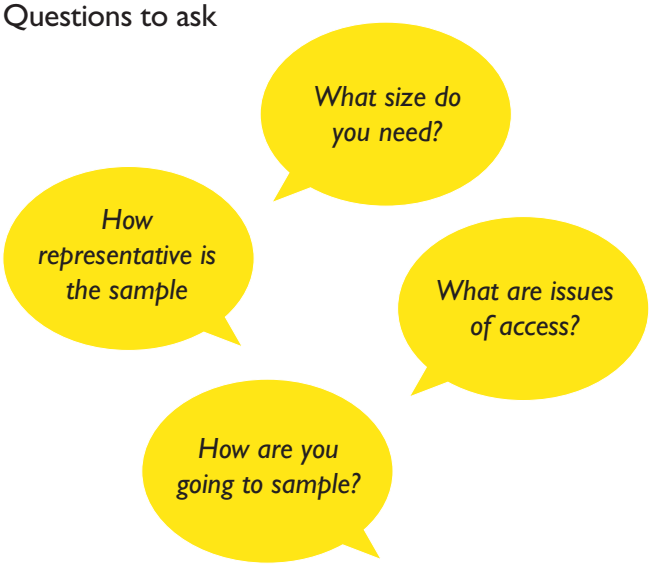
- It is very hard to identify which case studies are significant, particularly beforehand
- They are very complex to analyse, or to work out what to analyse
- Because of both these factors they can be very subjective
- They are not generalisable

# 11.13 Required sample size graph

| Required sample size* | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Confidence = **95%** | | | | Confidence = **99%** | | | |
| Population size | Margin of error | | | | Margin of error | | | |
| | **5.0%** | **3.5%** | **2.5%** | **1.0%** | **5.0%** | **3.5%** | **2.5%** | **1.0%** |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 20 | 19 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 19 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| 30 | 28 | 29 | 29 | 30 | 29 | 29 | 30 | 30 |
| 50 | 44 | 47 | 48 | 50 | 47 | 48 | 49 | 50 |
| 75 | 63 | 69 | 72 | 74 | 67 | 71 | 73 | 75 |
| 100 | 80 | 89 | 94 | 99 | 87 | 93 | 96 | 99 |
| 150 | 108 | 126 | 137 | 148 | 122 | 135 | 142 | 149 |
| 200 | 132 | 160 | 177 | 196 | 154 | 174 | 186 | 198 |
| 250 | 152 | 190 | 215 | 244 | 182 | 211 | 229 | 246 |
| 300 | 169 | 217 | 251 | 291 | 207 | 246 | 270 | 295 |
| 400 | 196 | 265 | 318 | 384 | 250 | 309 | 348 | 391 |
| 500 | 217 | 306 | 377 | 475 | 285 | 365 | 421 | 485 |
| 600 | 234 | 340 | 432 | 565 | 315 | 416 | 490 | 579 |
| 700 | 248 | 370 | 481 | 653 | 341 | 462 | 554 | 672 |
| 800 | 260 | 396 | 526 | 739 | 363 | 503 | 615 | 763 |
| 1,000 | 278 | 440 | 606 | 906 | 399 | 575 | 727 | 943 |
| 1,200 | 291 | 474 | 674 | 1,067 | 427 | 636 | 827 | 1,119 |
| 1,500 | 306 | 515 | 759 | 1,297 | 460 | 712 | 959 | 1,376 |
| 2,000 | 322 | 563 | 869 | 1,655 | 498 | 808 | 1,141 | 1,785 |
| 2,500 | 333 | 597 | 952 | 1,984 | 524 | 879 | 1,288 | 2,173 |
| 3,500 | 346 | 641 | 1,068 | 2,565 | 558 | 977 | 1,510 | 2,890 |
| 5,000 | 357 | 678 | 1,176 | 3,288 | 586 | 1,066 | 1,734 | 3,842 |
| 7,500 | 365 | 710 | 1,275 | 4,211 | 610 | 1,147 | 1,960 | 5,165 |
| 10,000 | 370 | 727 | 1,332 | 4,899 | 622 | 1,193 | 2,098 | 6,239 |
| 25,000 | 378 | 760 | 1,448 | 6,939 | 646 | 1,285 | 2,399 | 9,972 |
| 50,000 | 381 | 772 | 1,491 | 8,056 | 655 | 1,318 | 2,520 | 12,455 |
| 75,000 | 382 | 776 | 1,506 | 8,514 | 658 | 1,330 | 2,563 | 13,583 |
| 100,000 | 383 | 778 | 1,513 | 8,762 | 659 | 1,336 | 2,585 | 14,227 |
| 250,000 | 384 | 782 | 1,527 | 9,248 | 662 | 1,347 | 2,626 | 15,555 |
| 500,000 | 384 | 783 | 1,532 | 9,243 | 663 | 1,350 | 2,640 | 16,055 |
| 1,000,000 | 384 | 783 | 1,534 | 9,512 | 663 | 1,352 | 2,647 | 16,317 |
| 2,500,000 | 384 | 784 | 1,536 | 9,567 | 663 | 1,353 | 2,651 | 16,478 |
| 10,000,000 | 384 | 784 | 1,536 | 9,594 | 663 | 1,354 | 2,653 | 16,560 |
| 100,000,000 | 384 | 784 | 1,537 | 9,603 | 663 | 1,354 | 2,654 | 16,584 |
| 300,000,000 | 384 | 784 | 1,537 | 9,603 | 663 | 1,354 | 2,654 | 16,586 |

# 11.14 Hand-out: Sampling

## Questions to ask




## Ways of sampling

### *Random sampling*

- ***Simple*** – totally random
- ***Systematic*** – e.g. one from each school
- ***Stratified*** – e.g. x many girls, x many boys

### *Purposive sampling*

- ***Convenience*** – who you know
- ***Purposive*** – pick things you are looking for
- ***Snowball*** – pick some people and let it develop

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