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Qualitative poverty research methods

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Qualitative methods in consensual poverty research

Relative deprivation: the legacy of Peter Townsend



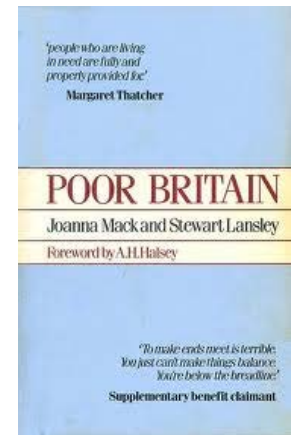
Poverty can be defined as:

Command over insufficient resources over time

The result of poverty is **deprivation**

"Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participation in the activities and the have the living conditions and the amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average family that they are in effect excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs, and activities"
(Townsend, 1979: 31)

Who decides? Relative deprivation & consensual poverty measurement



The evolution of the consensual or 'democratic' approach:

- *Poor Britain*: Mack & Lansley, 1985
- *Breadline Britain*: Gordon & Pantazis, 1990
- 1999 GB PSE survey: Pantazis et al., 2006
- 2012 UK PSE (forthcoming)

Some key Qs:

- Customs versus social norms: the impact of ideology?
- Social norms, entitlements and human rights: are rights relative?

Mack & Lansley aimed to: *'discover whether there is a public consensus on what is an unacceptable standard of living for Britain in 1983 and, if there is a consensus, who, if anyone, falls below that standard. The idea underlying this is that a person is in 'poverty' when their standard of living falls below the minimum deemed necessary by current public opinion'*

Mack & Lansley, 1985: 50

Measuring the 'necessities of life' in the 2012 PSE-UK study

About the 2012 PSE-UK survey

- Poverty as exclusion from socially agreed minimum living standards.
Measured by:
 - Public view on the 'necessities of life' (2012 ONS Opinions & Lifestyles Survey module)
 - Living standards and deprivation of 'necessities of life' (2012 PSE-UK Mainstage)

Measuring the 'necessities of life'

- Items which '*everyone should be able to afford and nobody should have to do without in the UK today*'
- Public 'consensus' exists where:
 - A majority of respondents agree specified items and activities
 - There are no significant social differences in respondents' perceptions of these items, e.g. across class, gender, age, etc.

The 2012 PSE-UK ONS Opinions survey module

SHUFFLE SET E (PINK) CARDS AND SORT BOX

[N1] *On these cards are a number of different items which relate to our standard of living. I would like you to indicate the living standards you feel all adults should have in Britain today by placing the cards in the appropriate box. BOX A is for items which you think are necessary – which all adults should be able to afford and which they should not have to do without. BOX B is for items which may be desirable but are not necessary.*

	SET E (PINK) CARDS	A	B	Unallocated
		Necessary	Desirable but not necessary	Does not apply
		[SETENEC]	[SETENOT]	[SETEDK]
(1)	Enough money to keep your home in a decent state of decoration			
(2)	Replace any worn out furniture			

The 2012 PSE-UK mainstage necessities module

Ask HHResp (i.e. HRP or HRP's partner)

[NoNcPr] Now I'd like to hand you some cards with items that relate to our standard of living. Please tell me which item you do or do not have by placing the cards on the base card that applies to you

[HRHvNec] SHUFFLE CARD SET 1 (PINK CARDS)

	A: Have [HRHvNd]	B: Don't have but don't want [HRDHDW]	C: Don't have and can't afford [HRDHCA]	Could not allocate [HRHVNA]
1. Car				
2. Washing machine				
3. Damp-free home				
4. Television				

[DoNec] And, thinking about activities? SHUFFLE CARD SET 3 (GREEN CARDS)

	H: Do [DoAct]	I: Don't do but don't want to do [DntWnt]	J: Don't do and can't afford [CntAff]	K: Don't do for any other reason [DontOt]	Could not allocate [OTAcNA]
1. A hobby or leisure activity					
2. A holiday away from home for one week a year, not staying with relatives					

Question development and testing in the PSE-UK study

Systematic Literature Reviews

- To build on pre-existing knowledge & experience

Focus groups

- Exploring public perceptions of deprivation, living standards and social exclusion to inform the survey questions

Cognitive Interviews

- Qualitative pre-testing of selected indicators for potential inclusion in the poverty survey

Survey pre-test

- Conventional survey pilot with interviewer de-briefing and analysis of non-response

Expert review

- Input from team members and international experts

Survey paradata

- Behaviour coding; analysis of question timings and interviewer characteristics

What are focus groups and how are they used?

- A form of qualitative research based on group interaction
- An ad hoc group created “to elicit people’s understandings, opinions and views, or to explore how these are advanced, elaborated and negotiated in a social context” (Wilkinson, 1998)
- Aims “not to infer but to understand, not to generalize but to determine the range, not to make statements about the population but to provide insights into how people perceived a situation” (Kreuger, 1994)
- Understand differences in perspectives/views
- Uncover influential factors
- Hear a range of ideas
- Collect information to design a quantitative study – hypotheses generation
- Shed light on pre-existing quantitative data
- Capture comments, views, attitudes or language used by a target audience

Strengths and weaknesses of focus groups

STRENGTHS

- Expedient and efficient
- Ability to ask questions directly
- Opportunity to “share and compare”
- Less structured than one-to-one interviews
- Group interaction stimulates memories & ideas
- Fast & relatively inexpensive
- High face validity (credible questions result in easily understood quotes & comments)

WEAKNESSES

- Difficult to assemble, recruit
- Not a natural social setting
- Sensitive topics may be unsuitable
- Self-report, limited to verbal interaction
- Less control than one-to-one interviews
- Less time with participants
- Group dynamics vs. individual interviews
- Requires special moderator skills
- Focus group dynamics vary

Focus group methods in question development

Qualitative development in the PSE-UK study

AIMS:

- To contribute to question development in the *NatCen Omnibus* (spring) and *PSE Main Stage* (autumn) surveys using qualitative piloting methods
- To update and advance the 'state of the art' in the measurement of PSE beyond the *1999 PSE*

OBJECTIVES:

- **Focus groups:** To explore public perceptions of deprivation, living standards and social exclusion in the UK today to inform the *NatCen Omnibus* and *PSE Main Stage* surveys
- **Cognitive interviews:** To undertake qualitative pre-testing of selected indicators for potential inclusion in the *PSE Main Stage* survey

2012 PSE-UK focus group sampling

Sampling considerations:

- *1999 ONS Omnibus* showed variation in public perceptions of 'necessities' by:
 - household income
 - household type
 - age
 - gender
 - ethnicity*
- Important to take account of these social differences in public perceptions of necessities in recruiting study participants

Quota sample design:

- Separate groups recruited by:
 - household income
 - household composition
 - ethnic origin (min ethnic booster)
- Within groups, respondents were then recruited by: gender; age; tenure; and; (where relevant) employment status and; age of oldest child
- In total, 14 focus group interviews with 114 participants were conducted in: Bristol, Cardiff, London, Glasgow and Belfast

* Pantazis et al., 2000, 2006.

2012 PSE-UK focus group research design

Format:

- Groups comprised 6-10 participants lasting 2.5 hours each. Research comprised two phases...

Phase One:

- Unstructured approach using *brainstorming* methods
- Aims to elicit participant suggestions on basis of group consensus
- *All* participants' asked to consider situation of hypothetical couple with two children

Phase Two:

- Sought to 'test' items agreed by Phase 1 groups, and also explore wider indicators of living standards based on *card sort* methods
- Participants sorted items into three groups:
 - **Necessities:** essential things which everyone should be able to afford if they want them
 - **Desirables:** things which many/most people have but which are *not* essential
 - **Luxuries:** things which are costly and exclusive and which fewer people have

2012 PSE-UK achieved focus group sample

ID	Group Profile	N	Location
BRS1	Working age, no dep. children: non-low income. Older owner-occupiers living in detached homes, mixed sex group	8	Bristol
BRS2	Working age, no dep. children: non-low income. Mixed age group owner-occupiers, predominantly male	9	Bristol
BRS3	Pensioners: low income. Owner occupiers living in mixed dwelling types, predominantly female	9	Bristol
CDF1	Pensioners: low income. Owner occupiers living in mixed dwelling types, predominantly female	8	Cardiff
CDF2	Couples with dep. children: non-low income. Younger owner occupiers living in mixed dwelling types, mixed sex group	9	Cardiff
CDF3	Single parents: non-low income. Mixed aged group renters living in semi-detached homes, predominantly female	9	Cardiff
LDN1	Ethnic minority: mixed income. Mixed age group renters living in mixed dwelling types, mixed sex group	9	London
LDN2	Ethnic minority: low income. Mixed age group LA/HA renters living in terraced houses and flats, mixed sex group	8	London
LDN3	Ethnic minority: non-low income. Younger mixed tenure group living in varied dwelling types, mixed sex group	8	London
GLS1	Working age, no dep. children: mixed income. Younger mixed tenure group, all male group	3*	Glasgow
GLS2	Single parents: low income. Younger private renters living in mixed dwelling types, predominantly female	6*	Glasgow
NI1	Couples with dep. children: mixed income. Younger private renters living in semis and terraced dwellings, mixed sex group	9	Belfast
NI2	Single parents: low income. Mixed age group renters living in mixed dwelling types, predominantly female	9	Belfast
NI3	Couples with dep. children: mixed income. Mixed age group owner occupiers living in semis and terraced dwelling, predominantly female	10	Belfast

Principles of successful focus group design

Design issues

- Purposive vs. convenience sampling
- “Homogeneous strangers”: may need to control factors such as gender, age, etc.
- Number of groups depends on heterogeneity of population of interest
- Working with pre-existing groups
- Over recruitment may be necessary
- Typically comprise 6-10 participants (depending on focus, moderator experience, etc)

Recruitment

- Using pre-existing lists
- Using gatekeepers
- Scheduling around other events
- Recruiting in ‘target rich’ environments
- Snowball sampling
- Use a screening/selection service
- Using advertisements

Developing focus group topic guides

CHARACTERISTICS

- A set of open-ended questions to guide discussion
- Maximum 12 questions
- Follows introductions
- Includes four types of questions
- Has an easy beginning
- Sequences naturally, moving from general to specific
- Manages time effectively
- Uses questions which are conversational, short, clear, open-ended and clearly directed

FORMAT

- Introductions and ground rules
- Ice breakers
- Opening questions
- Transition questions
- Key questions
- Ending questions

Conducting successful groups (pt 1)

ROLE

- Asks questions and *listen*
- Stimulates INTERACTION among group members
- Keeps the conversation on track
- Makes sure everyone participates
- Takes notes
- Remains unbiased
- Believes participants views are important
- Has sufficient background in the area of interest

TIPS

- Be well prepared
- Select an appropriate location
- Record the discussion
- Use purposeful small talk
- Have a smooth & snappy introduction
- Use pauses and probes
- Use subtle group control
- Use body language to show your interest
- Control reactions to participants
- Use an appropriate conclusion
- Know your audience

Conducting successful groups (pt 2)

TURNOUT

- Using incentives
- Careful scheduling
- Making personal contact with potential participants
- Removing barriers (childcare, transport, etc.)
- Sending personalized communications and reminders

SETTING

- Choose neutral, comfortable, quiet & accessible setting
- Ensure everyone can see each other around a table
- Ensure adequate space and audio recording facilities

CONDUCTING GROUPS

- Practice the introduction and question route
- Be comfortable with the questions
- Practice small talk(!)
- Gauge time per question
- Know which are key questions
- Set up before participants arrive
- Create a friendly atmosphere
- Greet participants
- Keep the conversation general
- Provide refreshments

Finally...expect the unexpected!

- If too few participants shows up
- If uninvited people show up
- If probes and pauses are not working
- If participants express extreme views
- If some individuals do not fully participate
- If some individuals dominate discussion
- If participants disclose personally compromising or illegal behaviours
- If participants do not want to leave

Class exercise 1: 2012 PSE-UK definitions of poverty exercise

Households living in the UK today are poor if:

Subsistence

“They do not have enough money to meet physical needs for food, shelter, warmth, light and sanitation for all members of the household”

Basic Needs

“They do not have enough money to meet their physical needs *and* to provide for education, access to information, and health and social care for all members of the household”

Relative Poverty

“They do have enough money to meet their basic needs *and* to fully participate in activities and living patterns which are customary in the UK today”

Class exercise 1: Understanding poverty definitions

Aim: To develop participants' skills in exploring public views on poverty definition in Uganda using the PSE-UK approach

Duration: 30 minutes including reporting

Reporting: On completion of this task, one participant from each group will be asked to report back verbally to the group. Dr Oloya will collate participant's suggestions using a flipchart.

TASK: Working in groups of SIX, conduct a mini-focus group to explore participants' views on poverty definition in Uganda

The PSE-UK interview protocol for this exercise is described below. Please adopt this approach in exploring participants' views on necessities in Uganda.

One participant will need to adopt the Interviewer role and one participant will need to act as Observer. These should be assigned to different participants to Exercise 2. Remaining participants will comprise the focus group.

In reporting back on this exercise, you will need to consider the following issues:

Which of these perspectives is most widely supported? How if at all do participants explain their responses? Is there evidence of a consensus on poverty definition here? What does this tell us about the nature of poverty?

Class exercise 2: Determining the ‘necessities of life’

“Necessities: Things which are essential and which everyone should be able to afford if they want them in our society today”

“We do not want to discuss what you personally need, but rather what you think everyone in the UK should be able to afford. Remember that we used the following example of an imaginary household:

SCENARIO 1: Tom (aged 38) and Jenny (aged 35) are a married couple with two children, Jack (aged 12) and Lizzie (aged 8). They live in the suburbs of Manchester. Tom works at a local hospital and is the sole wage earner within the household. Both parents are in good health but their younger child (Lizzie) is disabled.

Remember, too, that we are looking for what is a necessity for this household, where people in the household (adults or children) will be missing out on something that’s essential in the UK today if they lack it.

Begin with free discussion. Note participant suggestions on flipchart. Probe how important various factors are in reaching a collective decision”

Class exercise 2: Determining the necessities of life

Aim: To develop participants' skills in using brainstorming and card sort methods to explore public views on poverty in Uganda using the PSE-UK approach

Duration: 30 minutes including reporting

Reporting: On completion of this task, one participant from each group will be asked to report back verbally to the group. Dr Oloya will collate participant's suggestions using a flipchart.

TASK: Working in groups of SIX, conduct a mini-focus group to explore and report back on participants' views on necessities using either brainstorming or card sort methods.

Class groups will be randomly assigned to either Phase 1 (brainstorming) or Phase 2 (card sort) exercises. The PSE-UK interview protocols for this exercise are described below. Please adopt this approach in exploring participants' views on necessities.

One participant will need to adopt the Interviewer role and one participant will need to act as Observer. Remaining participants will comprise the focus group.

In reporting back on this exercise, you will need to consider the following issues:

What are the specific items and activities that participants have suggested? What rationales (if any) are offered in support of these suggestions? Are these items easy or difficult to phrase? Do they involve difficult decisions about 'how much is enough'? If so, how do participants make these decisions? Is there evidence of a consensus on necessities of life in Uganda amongst participants?

Was the group easy to moderate? Are there dominant views or participants? How did you address this?

Cognitive methods for testing survey questions

Survey design: a cautionary example

Drinking Water Perception Survey

11 If a bottle of water costs you three times more, would you continue buying it?

12 If not, what would you do?

I will drink regular tap water

I will drink filtered tap water

Other, please specify

13 Are you aware of the steps used to process a generic bottle of mineral water?

14 Do you believe that bottled water can be more expensive than oil?

15 When travelling overseas, do you find it easy to find your preferred bottled water brands?

If no, please explain.

20 How much importance do you give to drinking water on daily basis? Select 1(low)-10(high)

21 How concerned are you that there may be water problems, including water shortages, around the world? Select 1(low)-10(high)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

22 Please specify any global water issues or concerns you are aware of?

23 Have you taken any steps to help alleviate any water problems around the world? Please specify

24 Thank you for your participation. Please share any additional comments related to bottled water, tap water, and global water issues.

Some key questions in survey development

- Why is it necessary to test survey items prior to delivery?
- How do respondents go about answering survey questions?
- What are the implications of the survey response process for survey design?
- What are the main approaches to developing and testing survey items? How do they differ?
- What are the main advantages and limitations of cognitive interview methods?
- What are the main alternatives to cognitive testing methods in the design of survey instruments?

Approaches to question development & testing

OBJECTIVES

Question testing seeks to ensure questions are:

- Syntactically clear
- Conceptually unambiguous
- Easy to respond to
- Not sensitive

“Even after years of experience, no expert can write a perfect questionnaire...If you do not have the resources to pilot-test your questionnaire, don't do the study”

Sudman S, Bradburn N, 1982: 283

EXISTING APPROACHES

- Standard survey pilot methods
- Cognitive interviewing
- Qualitative methods
- Vignette analysis
- Behaviour coding
- (Response latency)
- (Post-hoc statistical modelling)

Standard survey pilot methods

- Based upon a small number of survey interviewers doing a small number of interviews:
e.g 20-40 interviews with 5 researchers
- Involve a field period of typically 1-2 weeks depending on delivery method (e.g. face-to-face vs telephone)
- Qualitative findings generated via interviewer group debriefing session(s)
- Follow-up analysis of resultant survey pilot data:
 - Item non-response
 - Unit non-response
 - Indicators of confusion

PROBLEMS:

Field pilots are incapable of identifying all problems which can exist with individual questions and the questionnaire as a whole because:

- Pilot tests identify only *overt* problems with question items – they do not identify problems which are not apparent from observing respondent behaviour
- Respondents may themselves be unaware of problems in survey response
- They provide no information on the reason for the problems observed

Cognitive Aspects of Survey Methodology (CASM)

- Answering survey questions involves complex and interrelated tasks: a simple 'stimulus-response' model is inadequate

'Responses to survey questions require a series of complex cognitive processes, or information processing steps, as opposed to a simple stimulus-response sequence (the classic behaviourist viewpoint)'

Willis: 2005

- Typically assumes a four-stage model (*opposite*) based on Tourangeau's work
- Willis (e.g. 2005) reject strict 'sequential model' in favour of more flexible info processing approach

- **Cognition** – interpretation of the intended meaning by the question and storage in short-term memory
- **Recall** – retrieval of information required (though respondents may skip this stage and make 'on the spot' judgements)
- **Judgement** – based on *availability* of relevant info; *representativeness* of recall data; *anchoring and adjustment* relative to social desirability and situational adequacy
- **Response** – selection of appropriate answer from available response categories

Implementing the CASM model: cognitive methods

“the practice of administering a survey questionnaire while collecting additional verbal information about the survey responses; this additional information is used to evaluate the quality of the response or to help determine whether the question is generating the sort of information that its author intends”

Beatty, 2004: 48

- Based on analysis of verbal reports derived from one-to-one interviews with respondents
- Respondent asked survey questions but focus is on survey response process

- Key techniques:
 - **Observation**
 - **Probing methods** (scripted and unscripted follow-ups).
 - **‘Think-aloud’** methods.
- Additional ‘cognitive’ techniques may be incorporated (vignettes, respondent debriefing; response latency; rating tasks; card sorts)
- Interviews explore issues including:
 - Interpretation of questions and terms
 - Recall and estimation strategies
 - Confidence in accuracy of responses
 - Sensitivity issues

Cognitive interviewing techniques

ADMINISTRATION

- Questions admin should seek to replicate survey conditions
 - Follow admin and routing instructions
 - Read Q's *exactly* as specified
 - Do *not* give cues of help
 - Code responses in specified format

OBSERVATION

- Note instances of hesitation, frustration, boredom, distress
- Do self-completion respondents:
 - read all instructions, routing, questions, responses, etc
 - Change their answers of skip items

THINK ALOUD

- Aims to encourage respondents to verbalise their thought process *in their own words*
- Respondent led and non-reactive method
- Issues:
 - High burden on respondents
 - Not all respondents like it!
 - May miss key areas: respondents may not verbalise key problems in survey response process

Cognitive interviewing techniques (contd.)

PROBING

- Different approaches to probing:
 - Concurrent vs. retrospective
 - General vs. specific
 - Scripted vs. spontaneous
- Interviewer directed approach
- Less task-intrusive
- Provides systematic coverage

LIMITATIONS:

- Potential for interviewer bias
- Findings have less ecological validity
- Clarity needed on question objectives

SUCCESSFUL PROBING...

- Uses neutral probes
- Uses open questions and follow-ups
- Provides full and detailed topic coverage
- Is relevant to question objectives
- Seeks clarification on cognitive process

Cognitive interviewing: strengths and weaknesses

STRENGTHS

- Reveals overt *and* covert problems
- Identifies cognition problems (task, syntax, words)
- Identifies recall problems
- Identifies problems of respondent judgement and response
- Can improve layout and sequence of survey items
- Can help clarify research objectives

WEAKNESSES

- Not based on random sample methods:
 - Cannot indicate extent or severity of problems
 - Cannot identify all potential problems that may exist
- Cannot fully replicate survey conditions (context, item ordering)
- Identifies problems not solutions: revised wording may generate further survey response problems!
- Does not fully encompass assessment of *interviewer* effects

Key issues in cognitive interviewing

PRACTICAL ISSUES:

- Cognitive methods are taxing for respondents: interviews should be limited to 50-60 mins.
- Within a 60 min. interview only a v limited number of questions can be tested – approx 12 items?
- Require experience and specific interviewer skills – this is NOT a qualitative research interview

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES:

- The CASM model is *respondent-focused*:
 - The survey interview is a *social interaction*
 - Interviewer behaviour is therefore important in determining survey response
- The CASM model is *task-focused*:
 - *Interviewer and respondent characteristics* are also important (though much less so than task characteristics)

Class exercise 3: Cognitive testing in the 2012 PSE-UK study - a worked example

Item(s): Cutback

Survey routing: All respondents

Measurement Objective: Measurement of the incidence of economising behaviour in relation to domestic fuel consumption based on respondent recall

Issues to investigate: How do respondents make judgements on this item? Do respondents experience difficulty in recalling the information needed to answer this question? Who are respondents thinking about in relation to economising behaviour? Are there any other possible response categories that are not covered here?

Supporting Materials

Showcard 3

[Cutback] *Did you (and your partner) cut back on heating, electricity, gas, other fuel or hot water at home in any of these ways last winter, because you could not afford the costs?* [READ OUT]

(Cutback)

CODE ALL THAT APPLY

<SHOWCARD 3>

THINK ALOUD (concurrent)

If respondent needs encouraging: What's going through your mind?

PROBES (retrospective):

- *Recall:* Did you have any difficulties in recalling the information you needed to answer this question? If so, please explain.
- *Judgement:* Who were you thinking of when deciding how to answer these questions?
- *Response:* Are there any other reasons for cutting back on fuel use because of the costs which are missing from the options provided, or do they cover everything? What is missing?

Class exercise 3: Conducting cognitive interviews

Aim: To develop participants' skills in analysing qualitative data on public views on poverty definition in Uganda

Duration: 30 minutes

Reporting: On completion of this task, one participant from each group will be asked to report back verbally to the group. Dr Oloya will collate participant's suggestions using a flipchart.

TASK: Working in groups of THREE, conduct a short cognitive interview to test survey items on drawn from the 2012 PSE-UK study.

The PSE-UK cognitive interview protocol for this exercise is described below. Please adopt this approach in examining participants' responses on these items.

One participant will need to adopt the Interviewer role, one participant will need to act as Observer, and one participant will act as Respondent.

In reporting back on this exercise, you will need to consider the following issues:

What do respondents understand by terms like 'standard of living' and 'satisfied'? How do respondents go about answering questions of this type? Are probing and think aloud methods effective in investigating these issues?