
Interview with Una Widdett

Part 3: reflections

Is there anything you think could have been done differently either regarding the way that you did the research or the way the whole project was conducted now you know a little bit more about it, and you know looking back?

Well, of course we're going back so many years aren't we, and I can't remember really how I felt when it had all finished. You know, I thought it was a big achievement but I can't remember thinking they ought to have done this or ought to have done that. I mean knowing that the study was going to be published I thought that would be explanatory itself really, you know, that would be the thing that we were doing it for, to make a, well, you can't make a conclusion of it, but that it was being done to publish this book and I thought that was the end result really. But I can't remember thinking oh I wish it had been done differently or anything like that. It was very in-depth and the main thing was to get it done, get the questionnaires completed properly and try and get it done in the time limit that we'd got.

Did you feel pressured at all to try and get it done in a certain amount of time or was it quite relaxed?

Only the same as doing any other project when you've got a time limit, you know, and you'd perhaps think, well I must get out, because obviously with those sort of jobs you've got to go out in the evening a lot haven't you and I don't remember, oh I must have had a car at that time because when I first started interviewing I hadn't got a car and I used to go on the bus to different areas. Yes, that's right, and then one of the supervisors said to me, it would be such an advantage if you got a car to do all these different areas. That was when I first, in the early days, so I think that's what I did, I got a Mini and then I found I could whittle all over the place to different areas and it wasn't a problem.

Was there any precautions about your safety, you know, that you might be going into houses of people you didn't know and?

Well, I never had that sort of feeling, I never had, and I don't know whether it was this particular one, but when I did a lot of work in old areas where you'd go down entries in the evening when it was dark and you do all this, I never had any concerns. But I was only thinking or saying the other day, you couldn't do it now. You couldn't do what I did then. I did all sorts of things that you'd be very wary about doing these days. But I was very naïve and I just thought everybody was all right, as long as you were all right with them they were all right with you and you just expect to be treated as respectfully as you treat anyone else. But I'd certainly think twice about it now, some of the things I did, going in areas I didn't know. And as a health visitor if we were going anywhere alone we'd have to say where we were going and let somebody know where we were, but that was years afterwards. No, I never felt unhappy about it. I used to sail away and get on with the job.

Oh great. So, did you realise at the time the impact that the book would have or the research would have, did you think this is going to make a big difference, this is going to help with poverty or did you just, it was just a job and?

I think I was hoping that it would be a study which would enable the authorities to think of some sort of scheme to make things better for those people in those situations. But really I was just concentrating on doing the job and thinking, you know, I'm doing something that's important for somebody else to deal with really. I didn't really think too much about, you know, I felt they were the clever people, the people that were organising the survey, I was just one of the fieldworkers getting the questionnaires done, which I was very proud to do, but I didn't think that much beyond what was going to happen with it all.

And at what point did you find out what had become of the survey; did you follow it up after or when did you find out that a book had been written?

I don't know whether I got it in my mind that that was the purpose of doing the survey. I don't know. I just felt as though I knew all along it was being done, the study was being done to enable the book to be written, but I don't know whether that's just what I've concluded or whether it really was the case.

[Recording interrupted]

It's a shame it was so long ago. I mean if I'd have known this was going to happen these many years later I would have kept lots of notes about it, so I could have told you about it!

Yeah I know, you never know, do you! So, at what point did you realise, or maybe you still don't realise, the major impact that the book had, at what point did you realise that it was well known and?

Well, what was the major impact that the book had? I know it's a famous study and it's been the biggest one of its kind.

I think it helped people understand what poverty was like in the UK, that there was what's called relative poverty, that people might not be starving but they still suffer because they can't do what other people are doing.

Struggle in their life, yeah.

It just gave a very detailed picture of poverty at that time and it was a basis for a lot of surveys that happened after, not only in the UK but all around the world, so it did have a really big impact.

That's good. Do you think there'll be another follow-up one?

Well there has been, every so often there's other ones.

Oh.

They usually get called something else, like now it's called the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey, and it's the same household survey but they do it differently now with computers and everything.

I remember reading Inequalities in Health, by Black?

Yeah, the Black Report.

The Black Report yeah. That was when I was health visiting and then I thought, it comes back again you see, reminded me of doing that. But it's not easy reading, you've got to understand the situation, you know, you've got to be really into that. I mean the average Mr Joe Bloggs wouldn't be able to read the book and understand what was going on, would they?

I'm not sure. It depends what kind of background.

I'm asking you questions now!

Okay, so I haven't got any more questions, but is there anything else that you want to say that I haven't asked you? Any kind of memories that you've got or thoughts about the study or?

I can't, no. If I'd have really knew what you were going to ask I might have been able to scrape back a bit, but my only memory of it that was I felt very proud to be doing it and I felt very proud to be asked to participate in it because I didn't think I'd got that sort of level to be able to do that, and it's been like a tick on the board or something like that, what do they say, a notch on your gun or something! So it's been a good, I'm really proud that I was involved in it and to get this follow up was quite a surprise and I thought, well, it never goes away once you've done it, does it, it's always there, but I haven't got any particular, anything to ask you really.

Okay, no that's fine.

Are we going to get any information about what you're doing now and the outcome of interviewing all the people that you've managed to find that were involved in it?

Yeah.

Will there be anything?

There will, yeah. We can talk about that after I switch the camera off, but yeah, obviously we're very pleased that you did the research, so it was very good to talk to you.

Yes, quite a surprise after all those years!

Yeah, well, I'll leave it at that then, and thank you very much, that was really interesting.

Well thank you for coming.

Thank you.