

ESRC Cross-Investment Activity:  
NCRM Hub, University of Southampton / NOVELLA, Institute of Education London /  
Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research, University of Bristol

**POVERTY IN THE UK:**  
**ADVANCING PARADATA ANALYSIS AND OPEN ACCESS**

1 April 2013 – 31 July 2014

**Research Team:**

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**Aims and Objectives:**

This project aimed to provide open access to data from Peter Townsend's 1967-68 *Poverty in the UK* (PinUK) landmark UK survey, and to enhance the capacity to use it, through innovative analysis of micro paradata and comparative analysis of macro paradata. Key objectives were to:

1. Conduct innovative and illuminating secondary and comparative narrative and statistical analysis of micro and macro paradata, including on contextual materials, using the PinUK material with the 2012 *Poverty and Social Exclusion in the United Kingdom* (PSE UK) study as a contemporary comparison, through:
  - 1.1 Narrative analysis of micro paradata in the PinUK survey booklets to:
    - explore the methodological potential of the data and its analysis,
    - identify contextual issues in the process, and
    - illuminate the potential for further analyses through the substantive outcomes of the process.
  - 1.2 Identification and analysis of macro paradata from the PinUK survey and comparison with equivalent paradata from the PSE UK study to explore shifts and continuities in the social process of gathering household survey data about poverty.
  - 1.3 Tracing and video interviewing some of the original PinUK field interviewers and researchers working on the project to provide unique insights into the process of conducting the survey.
2. Proactively promote open access to the data and contextual material for the wider national and international social science community; build understanding of its substantive and methodological potential, and stimulate capacity for its use through:

- 2.1 Posting video interviews, digitised PinUK materials and illustrative paradata analysis on [www.poverty.ac.uk](http://www.poverty.ac.uk) for open access and use by the social science community and interested public, as well as digitised survey booklets being made available through the UK Data Archive (UKDA).
- 2.2 A day seminar on the open access material, to build understanding of its potential and stimulate capacity for its use, using analysis to illuminate the process, and conference contributions.

The Advancing Paradata project built on collaborative small-scale feasibility work on narrative analysis of classic micro paradata in the form of marginal notes (NCRM Hub and NOVELLA) and sorting of Townsend's Bristol papers and digitisation of the *Poverty in the United Kingdom* monograph (Townsend Centre).

Ethical approval for the project was received from the University of Southampton (ERGO ID 6043).

### **Methods:**

- Thematic analysis of 25 transcribed audio-recorded PSE UK survey interviews and narrative analysis of one transcribed audio-recorded PSE UK survey interview, and comparison with existing thematic and narrative analyses of marginalia in selected PinUK survey booklets.
- Production of metadata about interviewer, date and length of interview by UKDA and comparison with PSE UK survey.
- Production of metadata table with PinUK codes for region/parliamentary constituency and field interviewers working in the area.
- Personal contacts and online searching to contact Townsend's PinUK field interviewers and research team, and colleagues. Potential participants were sent information about the project and actual participants consented to a video-recorded interview for open access.
- Regular cross-investment team meetings in person and by Skype.
- Digitisation of paper-based materials by the UKDA and cross-investment project team.
- Advice and discussion from a concluding 'Community of Interest' group meeting: Jon Burton (Essex), Val Gillies (LSBU), Patrick Sturgis (Southampton) and Steve Woodland (ONS), held on 29 July 2014.

### **Findings and Outputs:**

#### *Thematic and narrative analysis*

Both the thematic and the narrative analysis of the PSE UK survey interview transcripts reveals that a key skill for field interviewers is the ability to be flexible in interviews, in the face of organisational concerns about standardisation:

- The majority of the audio-recorded interviews (just over half) were read with exact wording, some with slight changes, a few with major changes, and a minority skipped questions.
- Despite the increasing emphasis on standardisation of survey interviews, conversations do take place as part of survey interview process.
- Field interviewers establish rapport through conversational approaches. There are different struggles for an interviewer: the challenge of starting, presenting oneself in a way that allows for interviewers to begin the interview professionally and to build rapport, including jokes, linguistic adaptation and bounded empathy.

- It takes skill to negotiate around unscripted elements that come up unexpectedly, especially issues that are sensitive, while maintaining neutrality and progressing the interview without losing rapport.
- When people reveal private/traumatic circumstances it is beneficial that the interviewer has time, ability and willingness to acknowledge what they are saying rather than moving on to the next question immediately. In some instances this did not appear to happen.

Overall, the substantive data is as much a 'by'-product of the survey interview process as the conventional view that paradata is a by-product of substantive data gathering:

Thematic and narrative analyses of PinUK booklet marginalia are reported in NCRM Collaborative Activity 2011-2014 Final Report on 'The Possibilities of Narrative Analysis of Paradata: An Historically Situated Exploration', submitted to NCRM in June 2014.

### ***Video interviews***

We traced and video-interviewed 17 field interviewers, PinUK study research team members and colleagues, exceeding our aim of 10 interviews. This material provides unparalleled insight into the relational and methodological conduct of the survey, and academic and political reception of its findings.

Interviews were conducted with:

<i>Field interviewers</i>	<i>Research team</i>	<i>Colleagues</i>
Angela Avens	John Bond	David Donnison
Andrea Cordani	Hilary Land	Zsuzsa Ferge
Deirdre Forsyth and Morag Macdonald	Adrian Sinfield	Frank Field
Ian McCannah	John Veit-Wilson	David Piachaud
Annie Neligan	Alan Walker	Steve Winyard
Fred Twine		
Una Widdett		

In addition, we had email correspondence with one of the field interviewers about their memories of working on the survey, and traced one of the team who checked coding, both of whom decided not to be interviewed for the study.

### ***Open access***

Digitisation of a range of paper-based materials associated with the PinUK study has been carried out by the research team and UK Data Archive, ready for posting online for open access at [www.poverty.ac.uk](http://www.poverty.ac.uk):

- We have greatly exceeded our aim to digitise a third of the PinUK survey booklets held in the UKDA. All of the archived booklets are being digitised in full or in part, depending on the amount of marginal notes: 69 copied from cover to cover; 617 with covers and all pages with written text; and 1814 with covers and pp.39/39a (unfortunately around 1000 of the survey booklets are missing and cannot be traced). This process means that answers to the open question about causes of poverty have been captured for all the archived booklets. This coverage makes reuse of the data set more attractive, but has led to delay in producing the full digitised data set given the need to maintain quality. UKDA delivered all materials to the team at the end of September 2014.
- Papers held by Peter Townsend personally have been sorted and those relating to PinUK have been digitised for uploading to the poverty.ac.uk website.
- Papers held by Hilary Land personally, one of the researchers on the PinUK study who carried out the pilot study of large families, have been digitised for uploading to the poverty.ac.uk website.

We will also upload relevant metadata produced for the project. We expect that all the materials will be available for open use on the [www.poverty.ac.uk](http://www.poverty.ac.uk) site by the end of 2014.

### *Historical comparative analysis*

We built on the analyses of the PinUK and PSE UK by-products, interviews and contextual materials noted above, to develop an account of the technological, social and professional role changes that have occurred over the past 45 years, to illuminate how the conditions of production have an impact on the data produced:

- *Technological:* The survey delivery and analysis process in the 1960s was paper-based and painstaking. Field interviewers were trained in an ad hoc fashion and were on their own in data collection. Field interviewers made marginal notes on the survey booklets, amplifying, justifying, explaining and debriefing their coding decisions and interview practice. There is now electronic tracking and tracing of respondents as well as computer power to process data. There is standard and formalised briefing of field interviewers, and online monitoring in real time. Codes are automatically generated. Overall, there is now less possibility for spontaneous and flexible communication, and less opportunity to see the research as collaborative work.
- *Social:* Townsend was a politically-committed researcher and PinUK was intended to produce social change, while contemporary poverty researchers are expected to present their aims and methods as objective, not politically driven. Analysis of social surveys has to contextualise findings in normative expectations: e.g. it is easier to ask about income now than in the 1960s but harder to ask about sex; race was judged by the fieldworker in the 1960s and today is self-ascribed. There have been shifting power relations between researcher and interviewee: on average interviews are now half the length of those for PinUK, and some of the PinUK interview securement practices raise ethical issues. However, field interviewers were able to treat their informants as human beings in a liberal humanist way, whereas in a contemporary 'post humanist' period empathy is more hidden.
- *Professional role:* In both 1960s and 2010s field interviewers are not foregrounded and are at the bottom of the research hierarchy. On the PinUK survey though, field interviewers are visible through the marginalia, while in the contemporary study they are disembodied and absent. Field interviewers at both points need/ed to exercise skill and initiative; in the PinUK survey field interviewers could draw attention to this through marginalia but in the contemporary study it is discouraged and hidden in favour of standardisation.

### *Dissemination and promotion*

In order to stimulate interest and build understanding of the potential of the data being utilised in the project and we organised an event and delivered a series of papers:

- We held an event on the topic of 'Paradata, Marginalia and Fieldnotes: The Centrality of By-Products of Social Research' in collaboration with colleagues with similar interests at College Court Conference Centre, University of Leicester (Henrietta O'Connor and John Goodwin), on 14 January 2014. Two papers from the Advancing Paradata project were delivered: 'Paradata then and now 1: Marginal forms and narratives in the Poverty in the UK survey' and 'Paradata then and now 2: Paradata in poverty surveys, 1968 and 2012'.
- We organised a session on 'Possibilities of Paradata: Technologies and Social Practices: Poverty Surveys 60 Years On' for the 6<sup>th</sup> Research Methods Festival, St. Catherine's College, on 8 July 2014, with three papers from the project: 'Marginalia forms and narratives in the Poverty in the UK survey 1968', 'Applications of survey paradata and the UK Poverty and Social

Exclusion survey 2012' and 'Paradata and administering the UK Poverty and Social Exclusion survey'.

- We delivered a paper at the Social Policy Association Annual Conference: 'Illuminating forty-five years of poverty research through paradata and secondary analysis: technical, social and professional role changes between the Poverty in the UK (1967/68) and Poverty and Social Exclusion (2012) surveys', Social Policy Association, University of Sheffield, 16 July 2014.

A podcast about our work with the PinUK data was posted to the NCRM website (July 2014):

- Paradata in qualitative research:  
<http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/TandE/video/podcasts/view.php/paradata-in-qualitative-research>

In addition, we have and are bringing the project to attention through publications:

- We published an article about the project in the Social Policy Association's magazine: Edwards, R., Gordon, D. and Phoenix, A. (2014) 'Peter Townsend's *Poverty in the UK* study – a methodological investigation, *Policy World*, Spring, p.22.
- We are submitting (October 2014) an article for publication to *Quality and Quantity* on 'Quantitative conversations: The importance of developing rapport in standardised interviewing' by Bell, Fahmy and Gordon, D.
- We have secured a contract with Edward Elgar for a co-edited book: *Working With Paradata, Marginalia and Fieldnotes: The Centrality of By-Products of Social Research*, with two chapter contributions from our project: Elliott, Edwards, Phoenix and Boddy on 'Paradata then and now 1: Marginal forms and narratives in the Poverty in the UK survey', and Fahmy, Gordon and Bell on 'Paradata then and now 2: Paradata in poverty surveys, 1968 and 2012'. Publication is expected in 2016.
- We are drafting a co-authored article on technical, social and role changes in poverty survey research for submission to a leading social policy journal.

### **Early and Indicative Impacts:**

There are strong indications that, once they are digitised and posted up on the website, the classic survey materials will be of interest to researchers and lecturers, from doctoral students through to senior academics, across the disciplines:

Impact through stimulating scholarship in the field:

- Attendees at the joint cross-investment and Leicester event, attracted by the topic of advancing historical and comparative paradata analysis, ranged from doctoral students to senior academics, across the social science and humanities, and included independent researchers and archivists.

Impact through stimulating historical comparative analyses and data reuse:

- An early career housing studies researcher interested in the relationship between housing type and access for empirical research has conducted an analysis of selected digitised PinUK booklets alongside contemporary material, and delivered a paper on the topic at the Housing Studies Association Conference, April 2014.
- Contact from academics interested in downloading the sample of 100 PinUK digitised survey documents posted on the UK Data Service website, for their own and colleagues' potential reuse.

Impact through potential for teaching in the social policy field:

- The free-access availability of Townsend's groundbreaking *Poverty in the United Kingdom* book (1979) on the [www.poverty.ac.uk](http://www.poverty.ac.uk) website was circulated on the Social Policy jisc maillist, and enthusiastic responses were received from academics in France and Switzerland as well as the UK who noted use in their teaching

Impact through stimulating public interest:

- Public interest in the historical comparative data is demonstrated by contact from an independent television producer interested in the PinUK data as a potential launch point for a documentary, and by a broadcast journalist interested in the possibilities of the project for a radio programme.