

Interview with Morag Macdonald and Deidre Forsyth

Part 1: Recruitment and interview process

So first of all if you could just tell me about whatever you can remember about how you were recruited to the Poverty in the UK study?

Forsyth: I don't remember very much about that.

Macdonald: My memory was it was a market research company, and almost certainly they were advertising in the student union and we were looking for a job for the last summer when we were students. And so it was a market research company who employed us.

Did you know each other already?

Macdonald: Yes.

You were students together.

Macdonald: Yes.

And where were you students?

Macdonald: At Glasgow University doing law.

And do you remember anything about how you were recruited, if you went to a meeting where they explained what you were going to do or anything like that?

Macdonald: Yes, there was certainly someone who talked to us about what we were to do, and about what had been done beforehand. Because all the people that we were sent to see had already been interviewed and asked if they were

prepared to do a follow-up interview, and what we were doing was the follow-up interview.

Forsyth: So that meant that we knew that we weren't going to a hostile situation.

And had you done interviewing before or was this completely new to you?

Macdonald: I certainly hadn't.

Forsyth: I hadn't, no.

Was there training, did they teach you?

Macdonald: No.

And how long did you work on the project altogether, can you remember?

Forsyth: Was it a few weeks?

Macdonald: Yeah, I would have thought it was somewhere between four and six weeks.

And do you remember more or less how many interviews you did in the time, were you doing them every day or once a week?

Macdonald: It was more than once a week, and some days we did more than one interview.

Forsyth: I don't remember much about that, I have to say.

Macdonald: No, because there were two interviews on the same day that struck me, so I know that we did more than one. And we didn't do them all together. Sometimes we both went to the interview, and sometimes there was only one of

us. There were a couple where there was one, maybe one of us couldn't make it or something.

So the idea was that you went in twos really, but sometimes when it wasn't practical one of you went, is that it?

Macdonald: Yes, and the ones we did at night we always did together.

And was that your choice or that's what you were told?

Macdonald: That was our choice.

And which areas did you do, can you remember?

Forsyth: Did we do Shettleston?

Macdonald: Merry Hill.

Forsyth: Did we not do Shettleston?

Macdonald: I can't remember.

Macdonald: Bits of Glasgow I didn't know at all.

Forsyth: I don't think we were familiar with where we were going, so.

How did you get there?

Forsyth: I had a car. Well I had access to a car, so I think I drove.

And what kind of areas were they, were they well off or?

Forsyth: Probably not.

Macdonald: No, they weren't.

Were you in contact with other researchers at the time?

Macdonald: No.

None of the other researchers on the project.

Macdonald: No.

Did you have a supervisor that checked how you were going on, and that you could report back to after?

Forsyth: We must have had that surely.

Macdonald: Well I think we sent our completed questionnaires off to somebody, I think we must have posted them, I can't remember.

Forsyth: I'm sure we didn't gather them up, I'm sure we posted them back as we went along didn't we?

Macdonald: Yeah, because I remember one lot coming back and being asked if we could, or some question that hadn't been properly answered and we had to go back and ask it again or try and remember what the answer ought to be. So there was that kind of feedback, they were either happy with what we sent in or on that one occasion they wanted some more information, but that was all. And this was done by post, we never met anybody.

Forsyth: At the beginning.

Macdonald: Well at the beginning but after that I'm sure we didn't.

And what did you think about the research questions, could you understand what they were getting at or were you thinking I wonder why they ask that, if you can remember?

Forsyth: Well I don't actually remember the questions, but when I looked at the internet and looked at a questionnaire which may not have been this one but looked vaguely familiar, I thought the questions were all fairly obvious as to why they were being asked. So I guess, and this is a guess, that we would have

thought that there was a reason; it wasn't that difficult to work out the reason for the questions. I mean we were law students in our final year, we weren't, we did have some intelligence to be able to work that out.

Macdonald: But I remember being very surprised at one question, which was the one about how often do you eat meat. Because this was Glasgow in the 60s, we didn't meet many vegetarians, so I couldn't understand the point of the question because everybody had meat every day, except Fridays when you had fish. And I simply couldn't understand why this question was being asked until I got some of the answers, and people said once a week or not at all, and I realised then what the point of the question was. But when I started I simply didn't.

So you thought that everybody ate meat every day because that's all that you knew.

Macdonald: Yes, unless they didn't feel like it, so therefore it was a pointless question I thought to begin with.

And how did you feel when you found out that some people didn't eat meat every day?

Macdonald: I suppose I was surprised.

Forsyth: I don't remember being as surprised about that, because I'm sure we had macaroni quite a lot, so it may not have come. But I suppose if you know that you're better off, clearly better off than people that you're interviewing, I suppose you feel sorry, it might change how you view life I suppose, I presume it must have affected us that way. I'm sure it did actually.

Macdonald: Well yes, I know it affected me enormously because of the interviews that we did, but also we got, after a little while we realised we should leave the car around the corner.

Forsyth: Did we?

Macdonald: Yes, because we suddenly realised I think after a few interviews that we were final year law students at Glasgow, and that was very unusual for young

women at that time, because there was fewer than 10% of our class was women. And it seemed very intrusive for...

Forsyth: Showing off almost.

Macdonald: Yeah.

To have a car?

Macdonald: Well yeah, and to be asking these questions when we were clearly, or no, we were almost certain perceived as being much better off than the people we were.

Forsyth: And probably were actually.

Macdonald: Yes, well we certainly were perceived as being, whether we were or not, because people asked us, sometimes they asked us about our backgrounds and why we were doing this. And you can hardly say you're doing it for holiday money, which is what we were, for pin money. So yes, it had that kind of impression I think.

Did you tell them about yourself when they asked questions?

Macdonald: Yes.

Forsyth: It wasn't a secret.

And did you feel a bit awkward in general if the people were, you said they were from a different background you felt a bit awkward about that or?

Forsyth: I think we got used to it, I mean there probably was, the awkwardness might have been our inexperience at the beginning, of not being quite sure just putting these questions to strangers. But I think because it wasn't the first interview, you then realised that actually they're quite keen to talk about themselves. I think people are, I mean this is just a perception I've got over the

years, not particularly from that but I don't think people mind talking about themselves if they think it's for a reasonable reason, good reason.