MethodsNews

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Taking the Electoral Pulse

John Curtice, Department of Government, University of Strathclyde

The 1992 general election is one no pollster will forget. The final polls conducted in the last days of the campaign anticipated Labour would emerge a point ahead; in the event the Conservatives were victorious by eight points. It is an experience that, together with social and political change, has helped stimulate a revolution in polling methods.

In 1992 all polls were conducted face to face using quota sampling. It was assumed that if a poll interviewed a demographically representative sample of the adult population, it should usually be politically accurate too. Telephone polls were eschewed because those without access to a phone were particularly likely to vote Labour. The internet was yet to enter everyday life. Now none of the companies that regularly conduct Britain wide polls uses face to face interviewing. Most polls are conducted by telephone, thereby permitting at least some form of quasi-random sampling – quotas might still be applied once a randomly generated phone number has been answered. Others are conducted by internet amongst panels of people who have agreed to participate in such polls.

The question marks about the validity of internet polling are obvious. How can a group of people who have 'volunteered' to take part in online surveys possibly be representative of the whole adult population? There are equally compelling questions to be asked about telephone polling. The use of quasi-random sampling might look attractive to an academic methodologist – until it is appreciated that twelve phone calls are made for every interview obtained. Those who are willing and able to respond to a telephone survey are potentially atypical too. Meanwhile, polls conducted by either mode face a common problem. Following the advent of New Labour, the link between demographic characteristics and voting behaviour has weakened significantly.

Consequently there is no guarantee that a demographically representative sample will be politically accurate.

Against that backdrop, pollsters of all kinds have had to accept that their achieved samples may not faithfully reflect the views of the nation. They have had to recognise that as well as collecting data they have to 'model' it. One feature of this changed approach is that in estimating voting intentions many pollsters now take into account how people said they voted at the last election. How people voted last time is strongly correlated with how they will vote this time. So a poll that has the correct proportion of people saying they voted Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat last time should seemingly secure an accurate picture of what is happening this time.

There is, however, a catch. Not everyone accurately remembers how they voted last time. In particular some align their memory with their current preference. As a result weighting a poll so that the distribution of recall vote matches the result of the last election may overcorrect any bias in the sample. But as to how much allowance should be made for systematic faulty recall there is no clear guidance.

There are other challenges too. Will one party's voters be less likely to vote than another's – more likely perhaps in an era of lower turnout. And are the supporters of one party particularly reluctant to declare their allegiance? In various ways the pollsters are trying to deal with these possibilities too. But we will have to wait until May 6th to see whose approach was correct.

John Curtice is Professor of Politics, Strathclyde University and President of the British Polling Council. In January 2010 he organised a seminar on polling methodology on behalf of ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM). Presentations from the event are available in http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/TandE/events2010/0120

Career Mobility for Social Researchers

Nigel Goldie, CEO, The Social Research Association

The world of social research is more complex than often supposed and in particular with regard to the range of organisations undertaking this activity. Most people know of the major research agencies and sectors that employ social researchers, but many may not be aware the diversity and range of settings within which social research is undertaken.

Within the Social Research Association we have details of current and past members working within several hundred different organisations, that range from the independent freelancers, to small voluntary sector organisations and small departments in large organisations, to those employed by the major commercial and academic centres, as well as the large and complex bureaucracy of central government.

It appears from comments received at events we have organised for young researchers that many feel it is difficult to move between sectors and settings, and they can feel 'caught' within the one they first start work for. In many respects this is a matter of companies more actively promoting themselves, if such feelings are to be overcome and more mobility between sectors is to be fostered. What is also needed is a means for both employees and employers to assess comparable experience and competency if there is to be a more broadly shared understanding of what it is to work at given levels of seniority across different sectors.

In recognition of these questions the SRA embarked on a process some time ago to set out a competency framework that could be used across a wide range of social research settings. This was given a soft launch at the Annual Conference in December 2009 and has since been on the SRA website with a view to gaining the views of the wider social research community. The framework takes a matrix format with a range of competencies on one axis with levels of seniority on the other. The latter range from research assistant, researcher, senior or principal researcher, to manager or team leader. The main competencies are summarised under the headings of 'research design and methods', 'project initiation', 'project management', 'building constructive relationships', 'communication', 'building specialist technical and professional knowledge' and finally 'personal effectiveness'. Typically the level of competence required of an assistant is a 'basic awareness or understanding of ...', whereas for a researcher it is a 'good understanding and ability to apply principles'. For a senior researcher the expectation becomes one of an 'advanced' understanding, and the 'ability to anticipate application of principles and to able to advise and assess others', while the expectation of the manager goes beyond this to 'establish principles and quality standards, to ensure evaluation and foster creativity'.

Clearly while the form of the specification of competency by level may be similar this is not a matter of formulaic repetition. Take for example; 'working in partnership' (under – building constructive relationships) this moves from 'able to work collaboratively with peers in other organisations', to 'able to initiate collaborative working with …' to for a senior researcher; 'able to lead partnerships and represent own organisation. Able to engage in constructive discussion of issues with partners' and finally at the manager level to; 'take a strategic approach to developing alliances with partners. Takes a leading role in external bodies e.g. representing professional interests. Builds new and existing partnerships. . . . and to manage relationships with challenging organisations and individuals'. A researcher moving between organisations and sectors should thus be transferring the accumulated experience of working in partnership in varied settings.

Within the framework attention is given to what many may regard as the core competencies relating to methods, research design, interpretation and analysis of data, yet overall it could be argued that the most important competencies for a social researcher moving up the hierarchy are ones that are also generalisable to other occupations such as project management, written and oral communication, the management of budgets and staff. Confirmation of the relevance of stressing the importance of these competencies also comes from a recent analysis of the person specifications for 50 posts advertised on the SRA website. As well as looking for a social science degree, research experience and training and experience of varied methods and data analysis, they also stressed: report writing, communication and presentation skills, interpersonal and team working, networking, stake holder and customer relations and project management.

What this points to is that the ambitious researcher seeking to move between sectors needs to give increasing attention to developing a broad range of competencies. These go well beyond more technical and knowledge based skills to ones that draw on a wide range of managerial, personal and political abilities essential for working the complex environment within which much social research increasingly takes place.

Competency framework document:

http://www.the-sra.org.uk/documents/word/sra_%20competency_framework.doc

Capturing mobility: 24/7 population mapping

David Martin, School of Geography, University of Southampton

Geographers have long been interested in mapping population, and geographical information systems (GIS) now play a major role in the organization and data publication from modern censuses and government data sources for small areas.

The basic population data that result from these systems underpin a wide range of quantitative social science research and policy where there is interest in the spatial distribution of population characteristics or change. Nevertheless, population mapping has been concerned primarily with static distributions – generally those captured by censuses which essentially treat residential addresses as the 'location' of population. More than half a century ago Schmitt (1956) was able to state 'one of the most important and difficult problems now facing city planners is the development of accurate, usable techniques for estimating the current daytime population of census tracts in urban areas'. In the intervening years Torsten Hägerstrand (1970) developed a much-cited 'time-geography', demonstrating the enormous complexity of typical activity patterns, yet remarkably little progress has been made towards the mapping and analysis of mobile populations. Research on human mobility has tended to focus on long-term mobility in the form of migration – an enduring topic of policy relevance - but analysis and mapping of 'short-term' population dynamics has been conspicuously absent.

Emphasis on these short-term movements is now growing, fuelled for example by John Urry's influential 2007 work 'Mobilities'. Alongside this variety of more qualitative understandings of human mobility, an explosion in the availability of data about population is occurring, often as an indirect result of publishing performance statistics about public services but also as a by-product of business and service planning. Others, working in e-social science, are beginning to apply powerful microsimulation and geovisualization techniques which offer the promise of integrating and using this enormous diversity of data sources to produce time-specific, or even dynamic, maps of population distribution. This move towards a new variety of time-specific population models has enormous practical application, for example, in planning for natural or man-made emergencies ranging from the Buncefield refinery fire or the

Preliminary model of Southampton daytime population. Block heights represent population densities at 9am. ©2010 Tele Atlas ©2010 Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky ©Europa Technologies Image ©2010 Getmapping plc.

increasingly-likely inundation of coastal settlements by the sea. More sophisticated spatial population models can serve practical evacuation strategies but also analysis of the social inequalities of risk exposure and hazard.

Some of the most interesting conceptual principles for these new modelling approaches, which require a relatively sophisticated model of cyclical and chronological time as well as space, are set out by Ahola et al. (2007), whose paper also includes Helsinki case study. A current ESRC-funded project 'Population 24/7: space-time specific population surface modelling' is seeking to develop a generalisable framework for this type of modelling. It builds on UK 2001 census data and geographically referenced activity data from sources such as the government's Neighbourhood Statistics Service, Annual Business Inquiry service and Department for Transport traffic flow data. Activity data on workplaces, schools, hospitals, the transportation system, leisure and retail are represented as locations with associated time profiles, which are interrogated to allocate the entire population onto a regular geographical grid, specific to the target time being modelled. The gridded models are amenable to visualization in a variety of interesting ways, including as Google Earth layers, as shown above.

For further details, see http://www.soton.ac.uk/geography/research/rssa/pop247/index.html

References

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Hägerstrand, T. (1970) What about people in regional science? Papers in Regional Science 24(1), 6-21

Schmitt, R. C. (1956) Estimating Daytime Populations Journal of the American Planning Association 22 (2), 83-85

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David Martin is at the 4th ESRC Research Methods Festival

Session 13: Researching geographies and mobilities
Tuesday 6 July 2010, 9.15 - 12.45

Linking administrative and survey data: an application

Francesca Foliano and Anna Vignoles, ADMIN node, Institute of Education University of London

Why do we want linked datasets?

In recent years quantitative studies in many fields of applied research, such as economics, sociology and medical studies[1], have been enhanced by the use of surveys linked to administrative data. The advantage of administrative datasets is that they contain some basic information on (almost) every individual belonging to the targeted population, consistently collected over time. Their main drawback is that typically this information is not rich enough for many purposes. On the other hand survey data contain very rich and detailed information about respondents, but they are representative of the population only if the survey design is correct or if the non-responsiveness is such that the design is not affected. However often in longitudinal surveys respondents drop out of the survey on a non-random basis, leaving the researchers with data reflecting only a selected part of the population. Linking administrative and survey data allows the researchers, sometimes with the help of advanced statistical techniques, to overcome the shortcomings of both sources of data.

One example of these combined datasets for policy oriented research is the LSYPE[2]-NPD/PLASC[3]-LEASIS[4] dataset. The LSYPE is a survey of about 15,770 young people in England who were aged 13 and 14 in 2003/2004. The survey provides detailed information on pupils' personal characteristics, attitudes, experiences and behaviours, as well as on family background and parents' characteristics and aspirations. The first wave includes pupils in Year 9. These pupils have been followed and interviewed on an annual basis and the survey includes only individuals who gave their consent to link their survey data with the information included in administrative data sets, namely the NPD/PLASC and LEASIS.

The NPD/PLASC is an administrative dataset managed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. It provides information on pupils' achievement in standard national tests (Key stage tests) and a number of pupil-level background characteristics, such as gender, age and ethnicity and eligibility for Free School Meals. LEASIS is a database that contains school level characteristics. Linking LSYPE, NPD/PLASC and LEASIS provides the researcher with information on a wide range of issues concerning pupils in secondary schools in England, with the advantage of allowing the researchers to quantify the representativeness of the results with respect to the population of pupils.

How we use linked data

Our analysis exploits these data to investigate the relationship between school environment and young people's disengagement from school. The linked dataset gives us administrative data on pupil characteristics and achievement, with time varying survey data on a range of other issues. In particular, we use survey information on young people's feelings about school, i.e. their emotional engagement with school. Pupils are asked how much they agree with each of the statements:

1) I am happy when I am at school;
2) School is a waste of time for me;
3) School work is worth doing;
4) Most of the time I don't want to go to school;
5) On the whole I like being at school;
6) I work as hard as I can in school;
7) In a lesson, I often count the minutes till it ends;
8) The work I do in lessons is a waste of time;
9) I get good marks for my work.

Pupils choose values between 1 and 4, where 1 is "strongly agree" and 4 is "strongly disagree". The constructed disengagement scale is a sum of these answers that ranges from 9 to 36[5]. The final scale has a negative interpretation which means that the higher the score, the more negative is the young person's emotional engagement with school.

We found that pupils had more positive attitudes towards school in Wave 1 of the LSYPE survey than in Wave 3 of the survey, implying that a general increase in disengagement comes with age, as pupils move into the teen years.

We then try to explain changes in school disengagement during secondary school, examining the relationship between changes in engagement and changes in the following time-varying individual, family and school characteristics:
• school value added score, as a measure of school quality and school effectiveness;
• percentage of non-white British in the school as a measure of segregation;
• percentage of Special Education Needs pupils in the school;
• school size;
• pupil-teacher ratio;
• the young person's achievement;
• FSM status of the young person as a proxy of her socioeconomic status;
• whether the young person has been a victim of bullying;
• hours of work per week, if employed in a part-time job;
• parental marital status.

The empirical analysis is carried out in a way that we allow for individual characteristics that do not vary over time, such gender, ethnicity, and potentially fixed attitudinal factors, such as their family's attitudes to schooling.

In fact we can explain very little of the change in pupils' disengagement with school over time, although unsurprisingly we find a clear negative effect on engagement if the child is a victim of bullying. We also find that pupils who attend schools that are improving their academic performance, as measured by school value added scores, become less engaged. This suggests that changes in school performance, perhaps brought about by school improvement programmes, appear to be negatively related to pupils' feelings about school. Further research is needed to determine whether attempts to improve school performance can result in short or longer term student disengagement. Interestingly, there is no relationship between the change in individuals' academic progress and their engagement with school: students who like school remain engaged with school even if their academic performance varies.

References

1 http://www.annals.org/content/127/8_Part_2/691.full; http://ajph.aphapublications.org/cgi/content/full/92/9/1471
2 Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England.
3 National Pupil Database/Pupil Level Annual School Census.
4 LEA and School Information Service.
5 We reverse the order of the answers for questions with a positive interpretation.

Developments in social science research methods: 4th ESRC Research Methods Festival

The next ESRC Research Methods Festival will be held over the four days 5-8 July 2010. This will be the fourth Research Methods Festival, which has already become established as part of the regular calendar of events for members of the social science research community. Professor Graham Crow, the coordinator of the festival programme, reflects on the festival.

From its inception in 2004, the Research Methods Festival has provided a unique environment bringing together researchers from across the range of social science disciplines, from different sectors, from different methodological traditions, and from all career stages. One of the aims of the festival is to give delegates an opportunity to venture into unfamiliar territories that conventional discipline-based conferences cannot.

The festival plays a key role in NCRM achieving its mission of promoting knowledge and uptake of methodological developments among members of the social science community.

Something for everyone

The intention of the festival planners to run something rather different to a conventional conference comes out in various ways. There are over 60 sessions over the four festival days, ranging from presentations about cutting-edge developments in various areas of research methods to demonstrations of resources that are available to social science researchers and teachers, and from 'masterclasses' in particular methods to sessions of a more philosophical nature in which questions of ethics, meaning, and the impact of social scientific research are examined. The festival aims to achieve balanced coverage of methods, going beyond just the quantitative and qualitative divide. One of the features of the festivals which has proved especially popular in previous years is the 'What is?' format in which experts in a method are given 25 minutes to speak about their subject in an accessible and engaging way that assumes no prior knowledge on the part of the audience.

The festival takes place at St Catherine's College Oxford

Experience at previous festivals and the pattern of bookings so far for the forthcoming festival both indicate that many people have a desire to find out more about methods beyond those with which they are already familiar. The festival provides a place for delegates to do that in an atmosphere that celebrates the diversity of the social science research methods community.

Among the two hundred or more speakers some names will be more familiar than others. One innovation for 2010 is the 'in conversation' format in which three eminent social scientists – Tom Cook, Michael Agar, and Ann Oakley – will be engaged in conversation about their long and distinguished careers as social scientists. These informal sessions will take place after dinner on the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings respectively, as a way of rounding off a busy day's schedule in which delegates will have had up to ten sessions from which to choose at any one time. In addition to the formal programme, the festival also attracts a wide range of exhibitors including publishers, social research organizations and research training providers whose stands compete for delegates' attention. There are also opportunities for research students to exhibit posters about their research, with prizes for those adjudged to be the best examples of contemporary social science.

Team effort

The NCRM team who are organising the 4th Research Methods Festival have been planning this event since late 2008. We are confident that the festival programme will be on a par with those of the previous three festivals. The 2010 event will be different from its predecessors in some ways, but the aspiration is to build on the past while retaining the key elements of a successful formula.

We look forward to seeing all MethodsNews readers in Oxford!

Book your place at the 4th ESRC Research Methods Festival

The registrations for the festival are now open. To book your place at the festival please go to NCRM website www.ncrm.ac.uk

Fees: £50 per day for registrations before 16 April. From 17 April onwards registrations cost £60 per day. Reduced fees for full-time students.

Building Capacity through e-learning

Sean Moley, NCRM Hub, University of Southampton

NCRM is looking at ways to promote the wide range of e-learning activity currently in use across the centre. In November 2009 we held a centre-wide event dedicated to the sharing of good practice in e-learning.

Hazel Burke from the Realities node and Christina Silver from the QUIC node were joined by Zak Mensah (e-learning Officer at JISC Digital Media) and Graham Gibbs (Researcher for the Online QDA and REQUALLO projects at the University of Huddersfield) to present the opening session and share their experiences of the theoretical and practical issues in creating and editing audio and video resources and making them available online.

The Realities node has been working with JISC Digital Media and over the next few months will be working to produce video resources on qualitative interviewing. This work is supported through the JISC Digital Media Video Assist programme. The Realities website[1] currently contains recordings from selected presentations at Realities NCRM events, including workshops on 'Researching Place', 'Researching Migration' and 'Researching Sexualities'. Additional online resources on the site also include short 'toolkit' documents on the practical side of doing research, as well as working papers (see Hazel Burke's article on p. 7 of this issue of MethodsNews). Topics covered include: research ethics, writing with qualitative data, and using music elicitation.

CAQDAS/QUIC and the Online QDA/Requallo project are seen as 'sister' projects and collaborate closely in a range of areas, one of which has been the practical creation and editing of videos and developing web materials. The QUIC node are focusing on providing a range of online materials for use as self-teaching aids, as well as general resources to supplement QUIC's programme of hands-on workshops and seminars. Some of these resources are web pages, others are pdfs and these will be accompanied by software screen shots and video clips demonstrating how to perform certain tasks which are difficult to explain in text. QUIC's resources fall into two categories: Practicalities include resources dedicated to such tasks as choosing appropriate software packages, choosing the right tools from within these software packages, and working effectively in teams that use software packages. Resources in contrast include materials developed from the research streams of QUIC, which focus on analysing visual data, analysing survey data and integrating geographical data.

Learning with Moodle

Fiona Steele and Hilary Browne from the LEMMA II node gave a presentation on their experiences of developing online learning with Moodle: a free Course Management System (CMS). The session looked at the professional and technical Skill sets needed to develop a Moodle e-learning site[2], the writing of online courses, the integration of audio and video materials, and how Moodle can be tailored to meet specific needs. The presentation concluded with a round-up of the pros and cons of using Moodle as an e-learning platform.

The LEMMA II node has used Moodle to develop an on-line Moodle course in multilevel modelling, for learners with varying degrees of knowledge and experience of quantitative methods. There are currently seven modules ranging from introductory refreshers on quantitative research, intermediate modules on regression analysis of continuous and binary data, and more advanced modules on multilevel modelling. Each module is split into a series of lessons with integrated 'concepts' sections dealing with the underpinning theory and supported by examples from social science, as well as 'practical' sections that give detailed instructions on how to conduct analyses and how to interpret the results. Future modules are planned on multilevel analysis of categorical data, non-hierarchical structures and longitudinal data.

Testing is an integral part of LEMMA's e-learning course. Learners take a prerequisite quiz to assess their current level of statistical understanding, the results of which are used to guide them towards a suitable starting point in the course. There are also regular quizzes throughout the course with explanatory feedback on incorrect answers. Learner responses are recorded and linked to their profile data, which is collected at registration. LEMMA analyse these data to identify areas where learners are having difficulties and to help determine which of the online materials require improvement. Another key feature of the online course is that it produces data which can be used to evaluate the online materials in a more general sense and thus inform future training initiatives.

Moodle is also the CMS of choice for the SIMIAN node who are currently developing a Moodle site and are evaluating a variety of visual and multi-media methods for use in presenting course content. These include automated slideshows and screen-capture videos. The new site will give learners a theoretical background on Agent Based Modelling as well as guidance on building an agent-based model using NetLogo software. NetLogo functionality will be covered along with exercises and screen capture videos to demonstrate the modelling process and the error handling techniques used. Feedback on learner progress will be provided by quizzes at the end of each module, along with advice to learners on whether to repeat modules or move on to the next one.

Delivering training to wider audiences

While the majority of NCRM's capacity building activity is still face-to-face it is clear that the use of e-learning within NCRM is increasing, as the Centre capitalises on its potential to deliver advanced research methods training to an ever-widening audience.

References

1 http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/realities/resources
2 http://www.cmm.bristol.ac.uk/learning-training/course.shtml

Tools of the trade: Putting planning into practice for qualitative researchers

Turning a research design for a qualitative project into an actual piece of research can be a daunting task. It is a process which often brings up many questions and challenges for qualitative researchers. Hazel Burke from the Realities node writes about the toolkits they have developed to help other researchers.

Often the way that researchers work out how to put their plan into practice is either by trial and error, or by asking a colleague, as it can be hard to find this kind of information in books and articles on qualitative methods. Realities Toolkits are a series of short, straightforward documents designed to take the place of a helpful colleague. They are written from first-hand experience, which means that they can pass on useful tips, advice on what works and what doesn't, and suggest points that other researchers should consider.

Many of the toolkits deal with different ways of producing data. Nicola Allett's toolkit on using music in group research explores how using this method in her project on Extreme Metal fans helped her collect more reflective data about music experiences and memories.

Katherine Davies has written two toolkits based on her work on the Living Resemblances project. The first introduces the technique of leafleting chosen neighbourhoods and following up by knocking on doors to recruit participants. The second toolkit looks at practical issues for getting informed consent from participants to use visual data – in this case, family photos. This is a good example of a research task that is always simpler on paper than in practice and this toolkit gives useful information on when to seek consent for using visual data, negotiating different levels of consent for different purposes, and provides sample consent forms and practical examples.

Drawing again from the Living Resemblances project, Hazel Burke's toolkit on putting on an exhibition to disseminate research findings to the general public will help you plan how, when and where you put on your exhibition. There are tips on budgeting, publicity and how to produce your exhibition materials.

In his toolkit on using participatory maps, Nick Emmel draws on experiences from the Connected Lives project to show how participatory maps can be a useful research method for both individual and group research. The toolkit deals with everything from broad theoretical issues to which is the best stationery to take with you. Stewart Muir's toolkit on producing participatory video includes a brief introduction to the advantages and disadvantages of the method, sample instructions given to participants and tips about choosing and using equipment.

When we talk about ethics and research, the conversation usually turns to approval forms and boards, but there are other ethical issues to do with working on research projects, especially in teams. Toolkit #06, based on one of the Realities training workshops, considers the role of ethics in research teams, the helpful role that mentors can play and how producing a publications strategy can support ethical working.

We are adding to the toolkit series all the time, so do check the Realities website or join our email newslist for details of new publications as they are released. Download all toolkits free of charge from: www.manchester.ac.uk/realities/resources

New Methods Review Paper: Mixed Methods Approaches to Social Network Analysis

Social Network Analysis (SNA) has received growing attention in methodological debates in the social sciences. Recent mathematical developments and user-friendly computer programmes for visualising and measuring networks have led to significant advances in quantitative SNA. Amidst these developments there have been calls for the revival of qualitative approaches to social networks, not necessarily to supplant quantitative methods, but to complement them. Quantitative approaches map and measure networks by simplifying social relations into numerical data, where ties are either absent or present. They therefore bracket out questions of crucial importance to understanding the kinds of human interaction networks studied by social scientists. Qualitative approaches, on the other hand, enable analysts to consider issues relating to the construction, reproduction, variability and dynamics of complex social ties.

This methods review paper by Gemma Edwards considers the arguments for adopting a mixed-method approach to network analysis, firstly as they arise out of the existing research literature, and secondly, as they have been highlighted in explicit theoretical debates about combining quantitative and qualitative data and analysis. By unpacking the different ways in which researchers have combined quantitative and qualitative methods in network projects it also seeks to provide some guidance for others on 'how to' mix methods in SNA. In particular, it reviews literature in which quantitative SNA has been combined with interviews, ethnography and historical archival research and considers the benefits of these strategies. On a theoretical note, the paper considers suggestions that mixing quantitative and qualitative approaches can enable researchers to explore the structure (or form) of networks from an 'outsider's' view, and the content and processes of networks from an 'insider's' view. It also refers to recent discussions which suggest that SNA offers a particular opportunity for mixing methods because networks are both structure and process at the same time, and therefore evade simple categorisation as either quantitative or qualitative phenomena.

You can access this methods review paper in NCRM EPrints archive in http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/842/

Gemma Edwards is a Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Manchester.

Gemma Edwards is at the 4th ESRC Research Methods Festival

Session 41: Researching personal life and relationships II
Wednesday 7 July 2010, 14.00 - 17.35

4th ESRC Research Methods Festival

5 - 8 July 2010   at St Catherine's College Oxford

Registrations now open: 4th ESRC Research Methods Festival

ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) is proud to present the biggest social science research methods event of the year in the UK.

Dates and venue: 5-8 July 2010 at St Catherine's College Oxford

What is it? Over 230 speakers and 67 sessions covering developments in social science research methods and their applications.

Who is it for? This biennal festival attracts over 700 social scientists working in government, social and market research as well as researchers at universities, across the range of social science disciplines, and at all career stages.

Fees: £50 per day for registrations before 16 April. From 17 April onwards registrations cost £60 per day. Reduced fees for full-time students.

More details and registration: Visit www.ncrm.ac.uk

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