

Research Examples

RESEARCH EXAMPLE 1: An Informed Consent Sheet

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: Brave New World: Exploring the Navigation of Recently Established Independence in Young Adulthood

Researcher & Supervisor Names and Contact Information:

Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:

- The purpose of this study is to explore young adults' experiences of establishing and maintaining independence from their families of origin, including their parents, siblings, or extended family. Topics of interest may include the process of seeking one's own residence, becoming financially independent, establishing significant relationships, and navigating family relationships, among others. The objectives of the study are: (a) to better understand the experiences of young adults who seek independence from their families of origin and the social processes involved, and (b) to identify socio-cultural norms related to the life course and independence in the twenty-first century, and how these influence young adults' understandings and experiences.

Procedures:

- Participation in this study will involve two types of interviews: focus group interviews and one-on-one interviews. First, participants will be asked to attend and participate in focus group interviews with other young adults. These focus groups will take place in an interview room on the campus of the local university, and will last for approximately 90 minutes. Questions asked during the focus groups will be about general experiences of establishing and maintaining independence, and participants can share personal information only to the extent that they feel comfortable. Following the focus groups, individual interviews will be arranged at a time that is convenient for participants at

the university campus or another public setting of their choice (e.g., library, coffee shop). These interviews will involve questions soliciting further details and stories about participants' navigation of activities related to becoming independent, such as finding a place to live and/or a job, forming new relationships, and managing relationships with family. It is expected that the one-on-one interviews will last 60 minutes. Both the focus groups and individual interviews will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. Participants can choose to not answer any questions asked, and are encouraged to ask for more details about the study at any point during the research process.

Potential Risks and Benefits:

- There are no known or anticipated risks related to participation in this research. All information shared will remain confidential, and personal details such as name, family member's names, or address will not be shared with the findings. In the event that a participant discusses difficult experiences, the researcher will provide appropriate information about support services to the participant. In addition, there are no known or anticipated benefits to participation in this research; however, young adults might find it helpful to talk about their experiences and share strategies for establishing and maintaining independence with similar others. Additionally, the information shared can have benefits to knowledge in this area and development of appropriate services for young adults.

Compensation:

- Following completion of the focus group and one-on-one interviews, participants will receive a gift card of \$20 value for a local grocery store.

Confidentiality:

- Prior to participation in the focus group interviews, participants will be briefed on issues related to confidentiality. Specifically, it will be explained that all participants will be assigned a fake name (pseudonym). In addition, all personal details, such as name, family members' names, location of residence, etc. will be deleted from interview transcripts to maintain privacy. The findings of the research will take the form of common themes identified across the interviews. However, quotations from interviews may be shared as part of the research findings, but will be accompanied by a pseudonym rather than the participant's actual name. In addition, it will be noted that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed within the focus group setting, but that participants should

aim to keep all personal details private and not share information about other participants outside the focus group.

- In addition, the researcher will seek to maintain privacy by storing participants' contact information in a locked cabinet on the university campus or in a password protected e-mail account. The data labelled with pseudonyms will be stored separately on a password-protected computer on the university campus. All data will be stored securely for five years, after which time it will be destroyed beyond recognition.

Right to Withdraw:

- Participation in this study is voluntary, and you can answer only the questions that you are comfortable with. Withdrawal from the research study is possible at any time during data collection or in the four weeks following, for any reason without explanation or penalty of any sort. Participants can indicate to the researcher their wish to withdraw, or forego replying to two phone calls or e-mails regarding the one-on-one interviews. Your choice regarding participation will have no effect on your employment, access to services, or other aspects of well-being.
- Once data analysis has taken place (approximately four weeks after completion of interviews), it may no longer be possible to withdraw data from the thematic analysis. However, the researcher will not share quotations from any individuals wishing to withdraw more than four weeks after their interviews are complete.

Follow up:

- To obtain results from the study, please let the researcher know during the one-on-one interviews, or by telephone or e-mail.

Questions or Concerns:

- Please contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of the first page of this document.
- This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the Research Ethics Board at (phone number) or (e-mail). Out of town participants may call collect.

Consent:

- Participants will be asked to give consent prior to the focus group interview and one-on-one interview. Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description above.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

Name of Participant Signature Date

Name of Researcher Researcher's Signature

RESEARCH EXAMPLE 2A: An Information Sheet

IN FOCUS: STORIES OF LIFE WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER

Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you choose to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask questions about any aspect of the research if something is not clear or you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

What is the project's purpose?

There has been much attention to and discussion of Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in North American society, particularly among young people. However, there has been little effort to understand the experiences of adults who have been diagnosed with these conditions, either when young or as an adult. As such, this research project aims to improve understanding of how adults experience these disorders, how they seek to manage them in their eve-

ryday lives with respect to school, work, leisure, and relationships, and how they make sense of them. This project will involve interviews with 30 individuals who are 18 years and older. The findings will seek to identify common and unique experiences among individuals of diverse age, gender, cultural background, and socio-economic status.

Is participation in this study right for me?

If you are 18 years of age or older, have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and are willing to take part in a research study using photography and interviews, participation in this study may be right for you. However, it is up to you to decide if the research activities are something that you would like to take part in. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form indicating that you are aware of all of the important details about the research project. You will be given a copy of the consent form to keep, along with this information sheet. If after joining the study you decide that you would like to withdraw, this can be done by letting the researcher know. You will not have to give a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to participate in two interviews and a photography project. Specifically, the first interview will involve questions about your ADD or ADHD diagnosis, how it came about, and how you reacted to diagnosis. In addition, you will be asked to discuss how you manage symptoms related to the condition and its impact on different aspects of your life. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to. This interview will take an estimated 60 minutes. At the end, the researcher will explain the photography project in which you are asked to take photographs that reflect your experiences with ADD or ADHD. These photographs can be related to any aspect of your experience, and may be realistic or artistic in nature. However, we ask that you do not take photographs in which you could be identified, or any of other people.

A second interview will be arranged approximately 2–3 weeks after the first one, and will involve sharing the photographs that you have taken. Specifically, you will be asked to explain each photograph and what it means in relation to your experience of ADD or ADHD. Follow-up questions from the first interview may also be asked by the researcher. This interview will take an estimated 60 minutes. Both interviews will take place in a private room at a university campus, public library, or other mutually convenient setting. Interviews will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are no known benefits of participation; however, some individuals may find talking about their experiences to be therapeutic. In addition, the knowledge shared will help others to better understand what it is like to live with ADD or ADHD, and may contribute to improved educational and work-place policies and supports. As well, participants will receive a printed copy of their photographs.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be identified in any reports or publications, and a pseudonym will be used alongside quotations or images shared as part of the research findings.

Who is organizing and funding the research?

The research is funded by the (researcher's university).

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This research project has been ethically reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of (researcher's university). Please contact (researcher's name) at (telephone) or (e-mail) if you have any further questions.

RESEARCH EXAMPLE 2B: Advertisement Poster

IN FOCUS: STORIES OF LIFE WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER

An Invitation to Participate in a Research study about ADD and ADHD

We are seeking adults:

- Who are 18 years of age or older
- Have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Are willing to take part in a research study using photography and interviews

Why?

- To learn more about the experiences of those living with ADD and ADHD with the aim of improving understanding and raising awareness
- With the hope that the information shared may lead to future benefits for other adults who experience ADD and ADHD, such as improved educational and workplace policies and supports

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact (researcher's name) at (researcher's phone number) or (researcher's e-mail).

*Participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate if you call or e-mail.

RESEARCH EXAMPLE 3: A Research Proposal

Written by a recently qualified social worker undertaking further study at university.

Birth parents' experiences of care proceedings in Sheffield

Introduction and rationale for the study

The removal of a child from their birth parents through public law proceedings can be seen as the most draconian of measures taken by the local authority to intervene in the life of a child to protect them from suffering significant harm. The welfare of the child is the paramount concern of the court and the overriding principle governing social work practice, as established in The Children Act 1989 and endorsed in subsequent guidance (DfE, 2013). Nevertheless, this action impinges on the right to family life enshrined in Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998 and is likely to cause significant distress to the birth parents involved. Whilst upholding the necessity and value of legal action to remove children from abusive and neglectful homes and place them with nurturing and capable adoptive parents or foster carers, understanding the experience of birth parents during this traumatic period is vital in order for social workers to work constructively with them to aid their understanding of the reasons for the intervention. This is an area which has been largely overlooked in research and practice guidance (Hunt, 2010; Schofield *et al*, 2011; Smeeton and Boxall, 2011; DfE, 2011,

2013, 2014). The purpose of the small-scale empirical study proposed here is to explore first-hand the experiences of birth parents, identify key themes, and consider practice issues in order to assist social workers in developing meaningful relationships with parents in the midst of this ominous process. This is particularly relevant in my current role as a social worker within a specialist team undertaking parenting assessments as part of care proceedings.

Literature review

Research into parents' perceptions of social work, although scarce, has been undertaken in a variety of contexts, including child in need and child protection procedures, care proceedings, post proceedings where children are in foster care or have been adopted, and specifically in the experience of parents with learning disabilities. As a backdrop to my research proposal, I will consider studies undertaken in each of these contexts. It is noted that this is not an exhaustive review of parental feedback in all aspects of social work practice, but includes studies gathered in a review of the literature in relation to parents' perceptions of care proceedings.

Experiences of child in need & child protection procedures

A number of empirical studies have been undertaken regarding parents' experience of social work intervention outside the court arena, through child in need and child protection procedures, which provide a more general understanding of birth parents' perceptions of social work interventions. As part of a national research response to the 1987 Cleveland inquiry (Butler-Sloss, 1988), and an evaluation of the impact of The Children Act 1989, Cleaver and Freeman (1995) undertook a qualitative study involving 30 families undergoing child protection investigations, using semi-structured interviews and observations of interactions between family members to explore parents' perspectives of the process. They suggest that parents' experiences in the initial stages of child protection investigations have a significant impact on the subsequent case management and outcomes for the child, recognizing the need for social workers to foster constructive relationships with parents as well as children throughout their involvement. This landmark study emphasized the importance of parents' views being taken into account during child protection investigations.

Subsequent small-scale qualitative studies, predominantly using semi-structured interviews, have identified the quality of relationship with the social worker as key to parents' experience of child in need support and child protection investigations. Spratt and Callan (2004, p.217), who interviewed

12 parents with recent experience of a social care intervention, highlighted the relationship with the social worker as the “key determinant” of parents’ overall experience of the process and found that parents valued empathic, sincere, and reliable social workers. Similarly, Dale (2004, p.137) interviewed 25 parents and step-parents who had recent or current experience of a child protection investigation and found that the provision of preventative services and the “engaging style of practitioners” were crucial factors impacting on the effectiveness of the service parents felt they received. Ghaffer *et al* (2012, p.897) interviewed 42 parents and carers regarding their experience of child protection investigations, and found the foremost issues to be a lack of information sharing and a feeling that social workers “did not acknowledge the level of stress experienced during the assessment process.” Parents valued workers who “listened to their point of view and who were respectful, honest and consistent” (*Ibid.*, p.902). Fuller *et al* (2014, p.14), who interviewed 20 parents recruited through a survey, highlighted that participants “emphasized the importance of emotional support from their caseworker above all other aspects.” In contrast to these qualitative studies, Merkel-Holguin *et al* (2015) obtained quantitative survey data from 1,595 families receiving social care interventions and analyzed parental satisfaction by asking participants to scale their emotional response in terms of 12 emotional descriptors. They identified that families who had received only one visit from social workers reported higher levels of anxiety and frustration than those who received two or more visits. The implication was that follow-up and continuity of worker was appreciated.

Parents with learning disabilities

Research undertaken to gather the views of parents with learning disabilities depicts a poignant narrative of disempowerment in the court system and a plea for respect and recognition. Booth and Booth (2005, p.111) interviewed 22 parents with learning difficulties regarding their experiences of care proceedings and found that a third of these parents “could not recall ever having” an assessment of their parenting capacity. Booth and Booth describe a covert or “closet assessment” (*Ibid.*, p.112), characteristically undertaken without explicit assessment criteria and clear feedback, and advocate a “more open and transparent process” (p.114). Parents valued social workers who were helpful, willing to listen and who were “not being bossy” (p.115). In terms of the court arena, Booth and Booth found that parents displayed “a resignation or submission to . . . the court” (p.120) and remained “preoccupied” (p.123) in the aftermath of this traumatic experience. Tarleton and Ward (2007) interviewed 17 parents with learning disabilities about the support they received during court proceedings. They found that parents recognized the need for an advocate in the court process and

identified the following qualities of a good supporter, as one parent described: “Listen, pay attention, take feedback, do what we ask, have confidence in us and trust that we can do it. Don’t judge us.” (*Ibid.*, p.197). Tarleton (2008, p.136) went on to interview 14 parents about their experience of advocacy services in child protection investigations and care proceedings and found that parents felt they were “treated with more respect” by social workers when they had an advocate with them.

Care proceedings and beyond

As part of the aforementioned research conducted to evaluate the impact of The Children Act 1989, Freeman and Hunt (1998, p.35) undertook semi-structured interviews with 34 parents of children who had been the subject of recent care proceedings and found that parents felt intimidated and experienced “high levels of anxiety and distress” in the court arena. The study highlighted the need for parents to be provided with clear information, advice and advocacy, and emotional and practical support in the aftermath, whether children were removed or returned home. Whilst these principles have been broadly applied in practice guidance, there has been a scarcity of empirical research in this area since, presumably due to the practicalities of accessing participants (Booth and Booth, 2005; Hunt, 2010; DfE, 2011, 2014). Smeeton and Boxall (2011, p.446) acknowledge the difficulties in recruiting participants for an empirical study in which they eventually interviewed three “non-relinquishing birth parents” where children have been placed for adoption. They highlight “feelings of hopelessness” (*Ibid.*, p.449) and a “loss of ownership of their own stories” (p.448) experienced by these parents, and recommend that social workers provide clear and honest information to parents, produce a fair and balanced report, which recognizes strengths as well as weaknesses, and demonstrate sensitivity to parents in this highly emotive and distressing process.

A number of studies have gathered birth parents’ perspectives in the aftermath of court proceedings, addressing issues of contact, children returning home from foster care and parents’ ongoing experience of loss. Malet *et al* (2009) undertook semi-structured interviews with nine birth parents whose children had returned home from foster care. Parents described feeling “unwelcome, powerless and threatened” (*Ibid.*, p.81), although their experience of court proceedings and Looked After Child reviews was “often dependent on their relationship with individual social workers” (p.81). A key theme was the desire to participate in the decision making for their child. Similarly, Schofield *et al* (2011, p.85), who conducted interviews and focus groups with 68 parents of children who were in foster care, found that parents wanted “to feel as involved as was possible in their children’s lives.”

Schofield *et al* (2011, p.75) discussed parents' prevailing experiences of loss and "threatened identity" as parents. Finally, Larkins *et al* (2015, p.303) undertook semi-structured interviews with 19 parents of children within the care system and, again, found that parents valued "involvement in decision making" and social workers who were flexible and supportive.

The need for further research

This review has highlighted the scarcity of empirical research undertaken with birth parents in care proceedings. Of the existing studies into parents' perceptions of care proceedings and social work intervention more generally, the literature suggests that the manner in which the social worker conducts him or herself, the quality of the relationship formed between the social worker and parent, and parents' sense of agency in the process have a significant impact on birth parents' experiences.

Aims, objectives and research questions

The aim of the proposed research project is to further explore the personal experiences of birth parents who have undergone care proceedings, building on previous research in this area, in order to inform social work practice and promote better outcomes for children and their families. By gaining an insight into the difficulties faced by birth parents during care proceedings, social workers can better empathize and build rapport with the parents they are assessing, improving the quality of assessment in order to make the best decision for the child, and promoting parental engagement and comprehension of the process. The objectives of this research are to obtain qualitative data through face to face interviews with birth parents, identify key themes from parents' experiences, and consider implications for social work practice. The research questions to be considered are as follows:

- What are the experiences and perspectives of birth parents who are assessed in care proceedings?
- What aspects of the process are most difficult for birth parents?
- How do birth parents think they could be better supported through the process?
- What are the implications for social work practice?

Methodology

In order to achieve a meaningful understanding of the experiences of birth parents in care proceedings, the proposed research will employ an inductive, qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews with birth parents to gain insight into their perspective and identify emerging themes. This approach is underpinned by an interpretivist, phenomenological stance, which "seeks to under-

stand the world from the participants' point of view" (Gray, 2014, p.165). An inductive approach is appropriate to a study which aims to draw key themes from the individual experiences of participants, rather than testing a hypothesis (Bryman & Bell, 2016).

Research method

The value of using qualitative, semi-structured interviews, as advocated by Bryne (2004, p.182), is that this focused yet flexible method of data collection allows greater exploration of the "views, interpretations of events, understandings, experiences and opinions" of the interviewee, as reported in their own words, which can be seen as empowering in the case of participants whose experience has been largely overlooked. As identified in the literature review, the majority of empirical research studies regarding birth parents' perspectives of social care interventions have used semi-structured interviews. Bryne (2004) describes qualitative interviewing as a "skilled process" (p.190) which is dependent on the interviewer's ability to utilize active listening skills and pick up on "non-verbal cues" (p.182). As an experienced social worker engaging on a daily basis with parents who are undergoing care proceedings, this method utilizes my strengths in terms of the interview skills I have developed in my professional capacity over recent years.

Limitations of the method

In terms of the limitations of this approach, it is acknowledged that a small scale qualitative study is limited in terms of "external validity" and cannot claim to be representative of the population as a whole (Gray, 2014, p.182). Nevertheless, "internal validity" (*Ibid.*) can be pursued by checking both the accuracy of the data and the "faithfulness of interpretation" with the participants, by offering a follow-up interview to share a summary of the analysis prior to completing the written report. Another limitation can be seen as the impact of the researcher on the responses of the participant. Bryne (2004, p.184) discusses the need for "self-scrutiny on the part of the researchers . . . acknowledging that the researcher approaches the research from a specific position and this affects the approach taken, the questions asked and the analysis produced." This is particularly relevant to my situation, in proposing to undertake interviews in the position of a researcher regarding an area within my own professional practice. In addition to ethical considerations detailed below, I will need to "adopt a reflexive stance" in my interpretation of the interview data gathered, recognizing the influence of my underlying personal and professional beliefs and values (Gray, 2014, p.175).

Access and sampling

Acknowledging the challenges of accessing birth parents who are willing to engage in research into such a private and emotive subject as the removal of their children, I will use purposive and snowball sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2016, p.245), aiming to conduct as many interviews as possible from the population of birth parents who have had involvement with care proceedings in the local authority within which I am employed, with a provisional target of achieving ten interviews within a four month period, as detailed in the timetable below. In terms of access, my position as an employee in the local authority provides an opportunity to reach the relevant population, although this is somewhat political process (Bryman & Bell, 2016). I will discuss my research proposal with the director of children and young people's services and, having gained ethical approval from the university and local authority, I propose to send letters to parents who have recently undergone care proceedings, explaining the purpose of the research and my intention to contact them by telephone or via their social worker to request their consent to be interviewed in their home and giving them the opportunity to opt out before the initial contact is made.

Ethical issues

Ethical considerations are pertinent to this proposed study, due to the increased risk of harm to participants, who represent a "vulnerable group," as a result of the highly sensitive nature of the topic and the power imbalance between birth parents, as service users, and the researcher, as service provider. As such, the study will require a full ethics review, as stipulated by the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014), which advises that researchers have "an ethical obligation to design, assess and conduct research in a way that protects participants from any unnecessary or avoidable risks" (TCPS2, p.22). Prior to undertaking interviews, I will provide prospective participants with information sheets regarding the purpose of the research and how the data will be used. I will explain in written form and verbally to participants how confidentiality will be maintained by transcribing interviews using pseudonyms and avoiding explicit reference to the details of the individual case beyond parents' shared views of the process. I will provide a consent form using clear and accessible language and will read this out to participants, as is standard practice by local authority social workers when undertaking assessments with parents. I will explain to participants their right to withdraw from the process at any time. Finally, drawing on interpersonal skills developed in practice, I will employ an empathic approach, responding to the emotional cues of participants and using sensitive language to avoid causing additional distress (Egan, 2007). It may be necessary to reflect on issues arising during the

interview process in supervision with my manager or with my personal tutor at the university, in order to appropriately manage my own responses to the information shared (Bryman & Bell, 2016; Gray, 2014).

Gray (2014, p.90) highlights the complexity of conducting research within one's own organization, pointing out that whilst participants are more easily accessible, "familiarity" may cause participants to "not answer as honestly as they otherwise would." This is particularly problematic given my professional role as a social worker who would ordinarily have an active role in care proceedings. Conversely, my employers, as "gatekeepers," could "seek to influence how the investigation will take place . . . and the form of the reports will take" (Bryman & Bell, 2016, p.19). While there are complex ethical issues attached to this research, my endeavour will be to ensure that my research is transparent, respectful towards participants, and achieves the desired aim of "value that outweighs any risk or harm," in providing an authentic insight into the experience of birth parents in order to ultimately improve outcomes for families undergoing the traumatic experience of care proceedings (ESRC, 2015, p.4).

Data collection and analysis

Interviews will be recorded, with the consent of participants, and transcribed for the purpose of analysis. In keeping with an inductive epistemological stance, thematic analysis will be employed, underpinned by Glaser and Strauss' (1967, p.32) concept of grounded theory, which emphasizes "theory as process." I will code transcripts in terms of categories identified from the literature review, regarding the positive and negative aspects of parents' experience of care proceedings, and will consider emerging themes, with a focus on identifying implications for social work practice (Silverman, 2005). I propose to offer follow-up interviews to participants, as used by Smeeton and Boxall (2011), to review the transcript data and ensure an accurate portrayal of the participants' experience has been preserved.

Impact of the study

It is anticipated that upon completion, the findings of this research will be presented to colleagues within the local authority in which I am employed, for the purpose of improving practice through a greater understanding of the perspectives of birth parents in care proceedings.

Timetable

Gantt Chart	2015			2016								
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept
Completing the literature review	X	X	X									
Obtaining ethical approval	X	X										
Recruiting participants			X	X	X	X						
Conducting interviews				X	X	X	X					
Transcribing interview data					X	X	X	X				
Data analysis						X	X	X	X			
Follow-up interviews								X	X			
Writing the research report								X	X	X	X	
Presenting findings to the department												X

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