



TIMESCAPES FINAL REPORT

The Timescapes Secondary Analysis Project

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(This ran for two years and formally accounted for 1 year of Irwin's time and one year RF time, although we extended latter to 18 months)

Aims and objectives

Background

Timescapes primary research projects were independently conceived, designed and run, by different research P.I.s and teams, although they had a range of common concerns. The Secondary Analysis Project was designed to explore the scope for working across the data sets, and to develop linked methodological, as well as substantive, insights. We also undertook to explore possibilities for building links with other extant, quantitative, data sets. The Secondary Analysis Project was run by Dr. Sarah Irwin. A Research Fellow, Dr. Mandy Winterton, was appointed in April 2010, for a period of one year, which we were subsequently able to extend to Sept 2011.

Although the Secondary Analysis Project ran within the final two years of Timescapes funding, in its early stages some primary projects were still generating data, and throughout its lifetime most projects were still preparing data for archiving, preparing data guides and undertaking their own analysis and writing. We were given access to part or (on occasion) all available individual project data in a timely way. This was often received in batches, in line with the timetables of the project teams, and their readiness to pass on data (for example, some teams wanted to anonymise data first, so they would be sending us the archive version of their data). None of the data was coded. There were very varying amounts of contextualising information sent with project data, at least in the first tranches.

A summary of SA project aims

- To engage a Research Fellow and contribute to their career development
- To undertake secondary analysis within, and across, Timescapes primary project data sets
- to meet with primary project teams face to face to discuss the aims of the secondary analysis project and its articulation with primary project aims
- To develop methodological insights in working across qualitative data sets; to develop effective strategies for working longitudinally and to explore the scope for extending the analytic reach of (for the most part) numerically small qualitative projects
- To explore possibilities for building links with large quantitative data sets
- To generate resources to aid others undertaking secondary analysis of qualitative data, through running a programme of secondary analysis training workshops (in conjunction with the Secondary Analysis strand and Archive projects), and through presentations, working papers and peer reviewed publications



Strategies undertaken for advancing the Timescapes secondary analysis project work

Background

Qualitative secondary analysis allows researchers to generate evidence and insight from pre-existing qualitative data. It has a long pedigree although it is not very extensively practiced. There is a rapidly growing interest in secondary analysis, in part since enhanced digital data archiving allows ease of access to extensive archived data resources. There has been quite extensive discussion in the literature about the epistemology and ethics of undertaking qualitative secondary analysis. Whilst the broad consensus is one which favours secondary analysis in principle, in practice there are important methodological and conceptual challenges which need tackling. Part of our remit has been developing resources to help in this task.

Strategies and methods

Within the Secondary Analysis project we undertook a range of strategies for exploring and analysing data:

We collected available guidance and information about the primary research projects, including methodological instruments (interview schedules; instructions relating to other methods in use) and requested data from the project teams. This was forthcoming, in batches, from early 2010.

We undertook preliminary readings and analyses within, and across, projects taking as a starting point analysis of data arising from some of the 'common questions'. These were a series of linked questions, relating to age, biography, generation and perceptions of historically significant events. All Timescapes projects had agreed to ask a shared set of questions both for substantive and for methodological interest. Would such common questions offer a meaningful point of linkage across the diversely constituted projects? We developed a series of early analyses here and built a picture of the kinds of methodological and contextual factors contributing to diversity of responses both within, and across, the data sets. We have documented these (e.g. Irwin and Winterton 2011a). These analyses provided a helpful way into the data sets and an excellent orientation to some of the issues arising in undertaking secondary analysis and in working across data sets, as well as a productive set of questions and workshop resources for early dissemination.

We next explored project data as it related to broad themes held in common across the projects (here there were no formal, 'made', points of connection). We started with broad conceptual questions relating to such themes (for example, relating to contexts in which people experience life course transitions). We undertook readings and analyses across subsets of Timescapes projects in order to ascertain how productively we could address our questions through the data. This was important since interview schedules offer a guide but not a definitive account of the nature of data available, or depth of coverage on particular topics. We identified what we saw as potentially productive questions which could be asked across (subsets of) projects, broadly relating to issues of gender. We documented these question areas in a Discussion Paper which was distributed to project teams, in the autumn of 2010. (This was subsequently written up as Irwin and Winterton 2011b).

We undertook face to face meetings with project team members through the winter of 2010-11, and based our discussion around questions relating to issues raised in the Discussion Paper.



These meetings were helpful for enhancing our understanding of the primary research project data, from the originating researchers' perspectives. We also shared our insights as secondary analysts of project data, discussed our own aims in more depth, and jointly discussed how the secondary and primary projects might best interrelate.

In light of these discussions and further reading of data we fine-tuned our research questions to focus on issues of gender, time pressure and commitments to paid work and care in the lives of parents with young (pre- and primary school age) children, working primarily with data from the Work and Family Lives and the Men as Fathers projects. In so doing we took an area of substantive interest, and evolved linked secondary analytic methodological insights. Even in this area where we could ask seemingly similar questions of data we needed to maintain critical awareness of differences across projects. The projects had different sampling strategies and sample composition, differing disciplinary interests, and differing methodologies and temporal lenses. We could not ask identical questions across data sets as this would wrongly impose a presumption of equivalence. We needed, rather, to develop hypotheses and conceptual ideas drawing on one data set and then develop corresponding questions we could ask of the other data set. One of the key arguments we developed here was the importance of working with data initially on a single project basis and then finding ways to translate evidence to bring it into meaningful conversation with the other, very differently constituted project data. This need for translation of questions and evidence across data sets is an important lesson for analysts seeking to work across different data sets.

Another substantive area we researched was that of young people's expectations for the future and the substantive and unequal contexts in which these evolve. We helped coordinate the Timescapes Symposium on Imagined Futures (November 2010), with presentations on quantitative as well as qualitative evidence on young people's expectations, and hopes, for the future. Building on this we developed analysis of young people's short 'essays' on their imagined futures from the Timescapes projects 'Siblings as Friends' and 'Young Lives and Times' (Winterton and Irwin 2011) and then developed a full qualitative longitudinal analysis of young people's expectations about going to university, drawing on Young Lives and Times data.

We have also explored the scope for making links between Timescapes qualitative data and large quantitative data sets. We have sought links with the UK Household Longitudinal Study and undertaken a number of joint activities. For example Irwin, Neale and Holland were present at the launch of the UKHLS and co-produced with Heather Laurie (now director of UKHLS) a dissemination document showing the potential for links across the two research programmes. Heather Laurie has shared a platform with Irwin and other Timescapes members at different events, for example at the Research Methods Festival, at the Timescapes Residential on Secondary Analysis, and at the Timescapes Symposium on Imagined Futures. Additionally, through early work on the Young Lives and Times (YLT) project, Irwin developed some points of data connection with the Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England. She ran a survey as part of YLT, with some questions corresponding to the large scale national surveys (also the UKHLS Youth Survey drew one of its questions from Irwin's YLT survey). Participants to the YLT qualitative study also completed the survey questionnaire, so analyses could be developed drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data (Irwin 2009). Other points of connection are available to secondary analysts, for example YLT qualitative study participants also completed a UKHLS youth survey structured question on how they felt about different aspects of their lives, aspects which were covered in depth in the qualitative research. This would allow an analyst to see how project participants are situated with respect to national level data on these indices and then explore the qualitative corollary of the summary indices. All Timescapes projects have



generated spreadsheets with summary socio-demographic data for their participants. The data corresponds to that collected within UKHLS and LSYPE (where questions about educational expectations are being asked). This summary data provides project meta-data for re-users and, again, offers a (minimal) point of connection with large data sets. The strategies here are, in effect, post hoc, since Timescapes and quantitative longitudinal studies have proceeded on separate tracks. We very strongly recommend that large survey designs should also include integral qualitative studies, a costly exercise but one we believe would easily repay investment, most especially within current UK quantitative longitudinal surveys.

Findings

Effective secondary analysis requires an in-depth understanding of the data set(s) to be used, in both practical and conceptual terms. Analysts need:

- A detailed understanding of the research project(s) including knowledge of the research aims, and design, and familiarity with project reports and publications.
- A strategy for familiarising themselves with the project data as a whole, an understanding of the sample, its structure and internal diversity, and a logic for subsampling for detailed analysis where a large volume of data prohibits a comprehensive reading.
- An understanding of the structure and nature of project data, including knowledge of the ways in which it is embedded within, and reflects, the contexts in which it was produced (including, for example, knowledge of the project research design, sampling decisions, and biases, recruitment strategies, methodological tools and how they were put into use).

In respect of the latter point, we note that the literature has highlighted challenges to undertaking secondary analysis, and the most difficult challenges are seen as ones relating to sufficient knowledge of context. We have offered some responses to these challenges:

- We developed a critical review of the literature on secondary analysis and outlined our position in Irwin and Winterton 2011a, that whilst secondary analysts hold a different relationship to data as compared to the primary researchers, it is still possible to effectively build understanding and explanation through re-using data. We have subsequently sought to build on and elaborate this position in our analytic practices;
- We have documented what we see as minimal standards, and good practice, in the supply of meta-data and guidance by those archiving data for re-use;
- Through undertaking readings of data and analyses within, and across, Timescapes project data sets we have documented some of the varied ways in which data is embedded in the conditions of its production. This does not mean that we cannot work across different project data sets. However, to do so requires caution and critical reflection on how best to bring data sets into meaningful conversation.

There are different analytic strategies for working with the data within, and where appropriate across, data sets. We have taken some conventional approaches and employed them as follows:

- Working with data arising from questions asked in common across Timescapes projects we developed some preliminary thematic analyses to explore patterning and diversity within and across projects. We then developed case based and longitudinal readings, and reviewed and documented various lessons about the contextual embeddedness of data;
- Using a case based analysis we have sought to develop and refine concepts through building internal project comparisons;



- Through a strategy of translating concepts and evidence across research projects we have sought to enable meaningful ‘conversation’ across differently constituted data sets.
- Through longitudinal case based analysis, organised strategically with reference to social diversity, within one project, we have explored the interplay of specific influences on participants’ (educational) identities and expectations of going to university, and how these evolve differently, through time, across social groups. We analysed the temporal interplay of family, friendship, teacher and other influences. The temporal alignment, or dissonance, of these influences on young people have differing, and class related, implications for their evolving educational expectations. In this way the case based analysis sheds light on broader social structural processes.

Impact

We are confident that the secondary analysis project of Timescapes has had significant impact. There has been extensive demand for our training events, which have received very positive feedback. There has been a great deal of interest in our secondary analysis work which we have disseminated at many conferences and in several invited presentations. We have produced a series of working papers for the website and a Guide, and have various publications in press and under review.

Training

As part of our overlapping work with the ‘Secondary Analysis Strand’ we undertook and ran **three training workshops on Qualitative Secondary Analysis**, spread around the UK (in Leeds, London and Edinburgh). These were capped at 40 participants per workshop to allow meaningful interaction and small group work we could facilitate ourselves. The workshops were all fully subscribed. We received extremely positive feedback from these workshops. The training event was attended mostly by academics but also by practitioners, and government researchers. The evident demand for training was part of the context in which Timescapes and Leeds University ran a joint QL methods training day in September 2011. The Timescapes training workshop model proved a very valuable template for this more recent training event. Again the event generated requests for additional training of this kind.

Presentations

Throughout the secondary analysis project lifetime Irwin and Winterton have given a total of **17 conference and invitation presentations**. Requests for further presentations have followed and so far we have committed to doing two in 2012 (for UoE and UKDA). Our presentations have been in the UK and overseas, including one to the Community, Work and Family International Conference, University of Tampere, Finland (Irwin and Winterton, May 2011), and an invitation presentation and workshop at a University College Cork summer school on childhood and secondary data analysis (Winterton, Sept 2011). Another invitation presentation was made to NatCen, in the context of their seeking to develop proposals for undertaking secondary analysis across, and thereby bring together, UK Government evaluation studies (Irwin, Sept 2011).