Introduction

This method guide explores the practicalities and processes of using qualitative secondary analysis (QSA, hereafter) developed in an ESRC study on Ageing in Place. Although some commentary exists regarding the re-use of qualitative data, there are few practical guides on how to conduct QSA. To attend to this gap, we describe some of the ethical and epistemological issues involved in this approach as well as discussing how to ask new research questions with existing data. To conclude, we suggest some guiding principles for researchers interested in using QSA for future research projects.

Key points

- Qualitative data often remain under-used and there is the possibility of re-using them in order to explore new themes.
- QSA offers many exciting possibilities to develop new empirical insights with existing data.
- Researchers should also have a substantive reason for exploring previously collected data.
- New research questions must be asked of the data which are sensitive to and shaped by the data.

Background

'Ageing in place' is a popular term in social policy and refers to an approach which helps older people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible. Although largely driven by concerns over the cost of residential and nursing home care, this policy has been reinforced by academic research concerning the preferences of older people themselves. However, the benefits of this type of approach have yet to be systematically explored, with few studies focusing on the meaning of place for older people, and how this changes over time. Also, while public policy emphasises the benefits of ageing in place, the literature covering this topic remains sparse and there is little sociological research on what makes an age-friendly environment. The aim of the project is to advance empirical knowledge about ageing in place, using a QSA approach.

Why use QSA?

In the last fifteen years, the social sciences have seen a rapid increase in the drive towards reusing data, due to a range of reasons, including improvements to electronic infrastructure (Corti & Thompson 2004), methodological developments that have facilitated multiple interpretations of the same data (Holland et al. 2006) and funding bodies require that all data should be saved for re-use (Moore 2007). But while secondary data analysis of quantitative data has become commonplace and encouraged across disciplines, the practice of QSA has been met with criticism and concerns regarding potential methodological and ethical problems (Ruggiano & Perry 2017). Therefore, while QSA offers many exciting possibilities to develop new empirical insights with existing Researching Ageing in Place over Time: A guide to using Secondary Data Analysis

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data, this methodology has been met with controversy (see Moore 2006 for full discussion of this debate) including concerns about whether research ethics, including informed consent and participant confidentiality can be maintained by secondary researchers (Broom et al. 2011). However, proponents argue that ethical standards can be maintained with the re-use of data can lead to new revelations (Irwin & Winterton 2011), by applying a new perspective to existing data (Åkerström et al. 2004). More specifically, secondary data can be reanalysed, reworked and compared with contemporary data (Corti & Thompson 2004), or can be used to ask new set of questions according to a changing political context (Tarrant 2017). This guide does not rehearse the arguments concerning the pros and cons of re-using qualitative data in detail. Instead, it considers these issues in relation to the Ageing in Place project.

Our approach to QSA

'The experience of Ageing in place over time: A Longitudinal perspective' was funded by the ESRC's Secondary Data Analysis call. The project draws upon data archived with Timescapes, originally collected as part of the interdisciplinary 'Step Change' project funded by the EPSRC. The project explored travel, transport and mobility among people living in Leeds and Manchester between 2011-2016. It was designed to explore ways in which a 'step change' in understanding how travel behaviours of individuals and organisations could be achieved. One strand of the project included a longitudinal panel study, exploring how people use transport and why; how this use relates to their circumstances and relationships; and how external factors and events can influence travel patterns, both now and in the future.



Over a period of four years, three waves of data were collected, involving 250 participants, who lived in eight neighbourhoods with varying demographic profiles across Manchester and Leeds. All participants were invited to participate in three face-to-face, semi-structured interviews at yearly intervals as well as carrying out a travel survey. The interview transcripts from the panel study were archived with Timescapes in 2016 as well as drawing exercises and diagrams which participants completed in each interview. The Ageing in Place study examines a sub-sample of the data archived with Timescapes, focusing on the interviews carried out with people who were aged 50 or over, living in Greater Manchester.

Practicalities and processes of QSA

In what follows we explore some of the ethical and epistemological issues involved in this approach and how we have set out to ask a new set of research questions of our existing data.

1. Ethical and epistemological issues

There is concern that data become 'disembodied and disembedded' when archived, thereby increasing the likelihood that secondary researchers could 'misinterpret' data (Broom et al. 2009). Also, guestions have been raised about whether the 'duty of care' between researcher and participant will be lost during QSA (Irwin 2013) in relation to informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity (Ruggiano and Perry 2017) and intellectual property (Broom et al. 2011). However, the Step Change project collected data with re-use in mind. Therefore, participants were asked explicitly about whether their interviews could be stored and analysed by researchers for future projects. During the archiving process, the data were anonymised with names removed from the transcripts. However, as Ruggiano and Perry (2017) describe, the descriptiveness of qualitative data may allow others to identify respondents, while removing such descriptors may compromise the quality of the data. Since the focus of our QSA study is on how ageing relates to place, it remains important to keep some places names, such as the areas of Greater Manchester where participants live. But to ensure anonymity in future publications, we will remove any other personal identifiers such as street names where participants live, or their occupation.

In relation to epistemological concerns, it has been argued that qualitative data cannot be re-used without the accumulated background knowledge and tacit understanding that the original investigator acquired, which are commonly not written down but held in the researcher's head (Corti & Thompson, 2004). Further, critics argue that QSA has 'thin foundations' as secondary researchers are not immersed in the data, meaning that they have little if any knowledge of the context in which the interview was conducted, which qualitative researchers deem an essential part of grounding knowledge claims (Heaton 2008; Irwin, 2013). However, it has been argued that these criticisms are problematic, as to only think that 'being there' produces valuable analyses is limited (Irwin and Winterton 2011). Also as Heaton (2008) suggests, many qualitative studies are carried out by teams of researchers, involving researchers analysing data which they have not collected first hand.

For the Ageing in Place project, even though we do not have access to contextual information produced at the time of the interviews (such as how the sample were recruited, or field notes with details of the original interviews) the research team's knowledge of the Greater Manchester context and sociological perspectives on ageing in urban neighbourhoods provide a firm basis in which to carry out QSA.

2. Re-contextualising data/asking new questions of data

Qualitative material is commonly so rich that often data remain underexploited as large parts are not analysed (Corti and Thompson 2004). The Step Change data archived with



Timescapes had yet to be analysed in relation to older people's experiences of ageing or place attachment, and therefore provide a rich and valuable resource for QSA. Accordingly, our study focuses on the experiences of ageing over time, asking a new set of research questions about the connections between ageing, temporality and place and also exploring the experiences of ageing, over time. Following Mason (2007), we take an investigative epistemological approach, purposefully exploring 'with and about data' in order to be creative and interpretive. In other words, we apply a new perspective to existing material (Åkerström et al. 2004) exploring themes from the ageing/gerontology literature about the relationship between temporality, belonging to place and ageing to the existing material. In this view, new themes can be studied, new angles can be applied or new methods employed that may not have been possible at the time of the original analysis (Corti & Thompson, 2004). Therefore, it is the fit between data and research questions rather than proximity to the original context that will enable analytic sufficiency and validity (Irwin & Winterton 2011).



Guiding principles for future QSA

In response to some of the issues that our discussion has raised, and reflecting on our experiences on the Ageing in Place project, we recommend the following guiding principles for researchers interested in the potential of QSA:

1. While new data is expensive to collect and using existing sources can be seen as cost-effective, this is not a sufficient reason for conducting secondary analysis (Corti & Thompson 2004).

Researchers should also have a substantive reason for exploring previously collected data (Irwin & Winterton 2011). Qualitative data often remain under-used and there is the possibility of re-using them in order to explore new themes (Tarrant & Hughes 2018). The sorts of analyses which are possible with secondary research may be distinctly different to those imagined in the original project. For example, the Ageing in Place project is exploring the themes of ageing, place-attachment and temporality in a study which originally focusing on travel, transport and mobility because the archived interviews offer a rich accounts on people's everyday lives in later life. 2. The research questions must be new and ask novel

questions of the data, but crucially they must be sensitive to and shaped by the data. The aim of the secondary analysis is to examine what these biographical accounts and longitudinal qualitative data tell us about the ways that older people age in place over time. While exploring how place affects ageing over time, our study is also open to emerging themes from the interviews.

3. Acknowledge both the possibilities and limitations of QSA.

Qualitative research should be about 'energetically and creatively seeking out a range of data sources to answer pressing research questions in quite distinctive ways, as well as about using these sources critically and reflexively' (Mason 2007:1.4). Like all research methods, QSA will be constrained in particular ways but expansive in others (Irwin & Winterton 2011).

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