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What is Qualitative Longitudinal Research?

Dr Stephen Farrall

Dr Stephen Farrall,
Research Institute for Law, Politics & Justice,
Keele University,
Newcastle-under-Lyme,
Staffordshire,
ST5 5BG

01782 583 749

s.d.farrall@keele.ac.uk

Introduction

Longitudinal Qualitative Research is a relatively recent development which has yet to be fully articulated as a coherent methodology (Neale & Flowerdew, 2003:189), although examples of this style of research can be traced back several decades. There are few books which deal with it in any depth (although see Saldana, 2003). In this essay I am going to; outline longitudinal qualitative research (QLR); address the main features of it; provide an outline of its strengths and weaknesses; describe its advantages over other forms of research styles; and provide an exemplar of a study which employed QLR research design.

What is QLR?

QLR embodies a range of mainly in-depth interview-based studies which involve returning to interviewees to measure and explore changes which occur over time and the processes associated with these changes (see Holland et al 2004 for a full review). The approach is particularly useful if one is studying a process which has a notion of a 'career' of some sort or which involves a developmental process. For example, I study why people stop offending, which clearly involves understanding the processes by which an individual comes to realise the harm they are doing to both themselves and others, makes efforts to resist their engagement in crime, overcomes stigmas, builds relationships with non-offenders and so on. Similarly, studies of ageing or of other developmental processes (parenthood, changes in structural location such as from employee to retiree) are suitable for QLR.

There is currently no definition – nor will there ever be I suspect - of how long studies should last, nor is there any guidance in the literature as to how long the time intervals

between interviews ought to be. It is clear that, depending on the subject matter at hand, these sorts of decisions will need to be left to researchers and guided by their preferences and the nature of their studies. A study of the emotional strains placed on a relationship during first-time pregnancies would, one would imagine, need to last the best part of a year. However, a study of decision making in relation to career choices could last years, if not decades. Nor is there any suggestion that QLR studies have to be predominantly interview-based. Although I exclude ethnographic studies from this review, since these are almost always longitudinal in nature in that most ethnographies involve at least twelve months of fieldwork, there are some studies (e.g. MacLeod 1997) which have embedded interviews in wider ethnographies and have returned to subjects in order to complete a follow-up. I also exclude from this review those styles of qualitative interviewing which require repeated interviews for some other strategic purpose (e.g. psycho-analytic interviews, see Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). In essence, QLR studies often involve the following sorts of research design, although as Holland et al 2004:1 note, it is hard to draw precise boundaries around differing styles of QLR studies:

- In-depth interviews repeated at roughly fixed time intervals with the same people led by the same research team;
- Retracing respondents from an earlier study originally undertaken by a different research team;
- A once off long term follow-up of the lives of a particular group or groups of people.

In this review I am going to focus on the first of these. I make this choice since a) this is where my expertise lies, b) the other research designs are more idiosyncratic and therefore harder to draw firm conclusions from or lessons about in a review of this length and c) some these research designs may become untenable under research ethics guidelines. For example, returning to respondents from an earlier study originally interviewed by a different team of researchers raises questions around who 'owns' the data and the right (within reason) for respondents to decide who conducts research into themselves and their lives.

What Are the Strengths & Weakness of QLR?

Lets us leave to one side the basic strengths of both longitudinal research and of qualitative research, since QLR embodies both of these traditions in research methodology (readers who wish to know more about both longitudinal research and qualitative research respectively ought to consult other commentaries, e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1994, Taris, 2000, for outlines of these methodologies). Turning now to the strengths and weaknesses of QLR, let us commence with the weaknesses.

Weaknesses

QLR is incredibly time (and therefore resource) intensive. This brings with it all sorts of costs. For example, let us assume a study which interviewed people about their experiences of moving to a new city, and then followed them up after six months and again six months after that (i.e. three waves of interviews) . If one wanted 25 cases who had been seen at all three waves, one might want to slightly over recruit at wave one (say to 30). This would result in about 80 interviews in all. Assuming that each

interview lasted an hour and a half, and that it takes about six hours to transcribe one hour of taped interview, this represents 720 hours of transcribing work, which is usually billed at about £10-12 an hour, or £7,200 - £8,640 for the transcription *alone*. On top of this, one would need to budget for travel, possibly for payment to interviewees, staffing costs over the 12-18 months of the project and the cost of buying the tape machine and tapes etc. Already a relatively small and self contained project has started to look quite costly.

On top of this, there is the recognition that change often takes time to emerge, and as such, for some topic areas, some studies will need to be undertaken for years (Holland et al 2004:2). Therefore, the results of any such study may only arise several years after the study was commissioned. A further issue arises of course in this case: a commitment to a QLR study may be as much (or more) of a commitment on the part of the researcher as it is the respondents. If the project is intended to undertake follow-ups several years into the future, then the researcher will, in all likelihood, need to generate and continually regenerate research funds – a further cost in terms of time, energies and opportunities.

Like any follow-up or research design in which respondents are returned to, careful thought needs to be given to the design of the research instruments and questions fielded to the respondents. In most cases in-depth interviews do not feel overly cumbersome, as they provide ample opportunity for both respondents and interviewers to explore new areas within the realm of the interview and are far less standardised than, say, survey questionnaires. Nevertheless, some topics will inevitably be returned to in order to assess the development of issues around the main

focus of the study, and here one needs to pay attention to question fatigue. New ways of asking about the same topic may need to be engineered and one eye kept firmly on the production of socially desirable (and seemingly plausible) answers which do not fully reflect what the respondent truly feels.

Strengths

Built into QLR, and this discussion of it, is the assumption that one is undertaking a prospective rather than retrospective study. This design has certain advantages over retrospective studies. Retrospective studies can be influenced by respondent's failure to recall events or the correct ordering of events. They also leave themselves open to deliberate distortions as respondents attempt to imbue their actions with a rationality which they did not have at the time, or non-deliberate distortions due to subconscious suppressions of painful memories. With prospective studies one is less likely to be taken in by such biases, since one has a record of what was said earlier on the same topic. (Of course, this too may have been subject to various distortions, but assuming one can triangulate data with either other records or other respondents, it ought to be easier to detect).

Like retrospective studies, QLR allows for respondents to reflection on the changes (or lack of them) which they have experienced since the previous interview. Given that, during the follow-ups, one will have data relating to the respondent being interviewed, one can ask about specific events, periods or feelings in order to gauge changes in those arenas. For example, one could ask a respondent in a QLR study of the processes of home-leaving how they felt about the prospect of starting to live on their own, and then follow this up by recounting to them their previous answer and

asking them to reflect on how they feel about having left home. In this respect, the researcher is able to tailor-make follow-up interviews for each respondent and to plan to ask specific questions of them based on their previous answers and experiences. Of course, this represents a further time-cost, but one worth paying for the data it generates. It ought to also be added, that in my experience, reporting to respondents what they said in previous interviews elicits better data. Often this signals to respondents that you have taken the time to read and think about the previous interview with them and it does not automatically lead to the respondent simply 'agreeing' with their previous thoughts or feelings. The explanations which such 'disagreements' produce speak to the 'internal conversation' reported by Archer, 2000.

Another strength of QLR is its ability to link the micro to the macro, especially during periods of sustained and dramatic change. Social or organisational change, especially if it is dramatic and either takes some time to unfold or the consequences of it take some time to unfold often involves a change in the relationship between an individual and larger social organisations or institutions. For example, a study of the re-organisation of a large firm may take several months or more than a year or so to be completed. During this time employees' feelings about the processes of change will follow any number of trajectories, depending upon how the changes are progressing and what these mean for them as individuals. A QLR study of these processes of change would need to understand the employees' feelings in relation to the macro-level changes experienced by the organisation where the research was based.

Of late, and especially in the area of research in which I work (criminology), there has been a growing interest in assessing whether or not a particular intervention 'works'.

Numerous studies have attempted to assess the extent to which programmes aimed at rehabilitating ex-offenders, diverting 'at risk' youths from custody, reducing crime in certain areas and the such like have been undertaken (e.g. Lipsey, 1995, Lloyd et al, 1994). Whist these studies may be in a position to establish if these interventions worked or not, they are not often able to establish the precise mechanisms through which they did (or did not) work (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). QLR, with its focus on the unfolding of process in time, and focus on processes of structuration (1997: 56) is ideally suited to assisting in this broad body of research (Holland et al, 2004:1). There have been some suggests that, in relation to this, QLR studies can help to develop effective practice as well as effective policies (Holland et al 2004:2).

What are its advantages over quantitative longitudinal research?

In this section I shall outline the ways in which QLR may be considered to have some advantages over *quantitative* longitudinal research. Both quantitative research and quantitative longitudinal research have long traditions in social research (see Black, 1999, Ruspini, 2002), and this review is not meant as an attack on this body of research, merely a candid appraisal of how QLR scores over more convention longitudinal research.

All forms of longitudinal research and non-longitudinal research too, of course, allow one to situate respondents in time. However, what QLR offers is the chance to chart and explore how social problems became individual troubles. In this respect it offers a way of addressing Mills point that personal troubles have to be understood as public issues (1959:226). In this respect, QLR (as noted above) allow one to link macro-level processes or events to the lives and circumstances of individuals. True, quantitative

longitudinal research offers this possibility too, albeit for *groups* or *aggregations* of people rather than specific individuals.

Building on the observation that QLR allows the researcher to chart not just if a programmed-intervention works or not, but also why it worked or failed to work, QLR scores over quantitative longitudinal research in that it allows one to explore contexts, mechanisms and outcomes at the *individual* level. Although one is often interested in groups of like cases when one is exploring whether or not a programme works, researchers will need increasingly to specify why a programme worked and for whom under which circumstances (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). This requires a consideration of how particular processes work ‘on the ground’, and this is often best served by QLR.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the ways in which emotions shape human experience and unfold over time. Whilst quantitative research may be able to measure (and therefore chart changes in) some quasi-emotions such as trust or perceptions of legitimacy, other human emotions such as embarrassment, hope, loving feelings towards another and so on are far harder emotions to measure using survey questions. Furthermore, subtle changes in emotions, sudden, short-lived emotional states or (to respondents) the unique nature of their emotions are not suited to exploration using quantitative measures (Henwood & Lang, 2003:49). Therefore, QLR allows one to explore these sorts of emotions and how they alter over time in relation to other aspects of a respondent’s more fully than quantitative data analyses might.

Finally, this being a discussion (in part) about quantitative studies, a note about numbers. Quantitative studies rely on numbers for critical purpose: without a certain number of cases various statistical tests are invalid, and, of course, there are per unit cost savings to be made with larger survey samples. However, this limits the sorts of topics explored (and therefore the sorts of knowledge generated). In a study with a sample of 2,000 cases, the five cases that have experienced rare but theoretically interesting or enlightening events will be dropped from analyses. However, often rare events and experiences can tell us about other processes which we might either have neglected to foresee or which have only just started to emerge in the lives of the population. QLR better allows for the capturing of these experiences.

What are its advantages over qualitative research?

In this section I shall outline the ways in which QLR may be considered to have some advantages over *qualitative* research. Qualitative research has a long tradition in social research (see Miles & Huberman, 1994), and this review is again not meant as an attack on this body of research. In this section I seek merely to provide a candid appraisal of how QLR scores over more convention qualitative research.

Most studies which rely on qualitative data involve the strategic sampling of cases who share same characteristic. Studies are undertaken of a host of areas of social research or social policy concerns. However, rarely are these respondents returned to as assess the ways in which their lives, emotions and beliefs have changed over time or why this might be the case. This is not, of course, to suggest that such studies would be improved if they returned to the field and revisited respondents, but merely to highlight the fact that often qualitative studies are limited to what could be described as ‘contextualised snapshots of processes and peoples’. If more qualitative

researchers returned to members of their samples we might find that we had a greater understanding of the following:

- the impacts of a particular intervention (e.g. probation supervision or health care initiatives) on the lives of those selected for it;
- how and why respondents' feelings and thoughts about an issue change over time (e.g. attitude changes brought on by social or geographic mobility, see Prewitt et al, 1966, Glaser & Gilens, 1997, Pratt et al, 2003);
- the role of multiple causal factors in complex systems (e.g. decisions about how to provide care for elderly relatives).

A Word about Ethics

No discussion of a research technique as potentially complex as QLR could pass without comment on the ethics of QLR. QLR does not raise ethical issues which are not already present in both qualitative and longitudinal research, but rather it heightens them. Because, arguably, the level of engagement between the interviewer and the respondent is greater (due to prolonged contact), so too is the risk of disclosure of matters of a distinctly personal nature. This naturally raises issues of confidentiality (if and when to disclose information to third parties) and of intrusion (given that fieldwork may last several years). Some researchers have reported that they did not retrace all subjects in a study of drug use (Ward & Henderson, 2003). Similarly, when retracing members of a sample of offenders, I was mindful both of the duty to the safety of research staff when re-interviewing ex-offenders such that

those who were deemed to pose a risk to the interviewer were not recontacted and also of the duty of care to our interviewees. For example, one member of the sample who was initially interviewed during the first was abducted (by her drug dealer) and gang-raped. Although we interviewed her probation officer as planned, we made no efforts to re-interview her, preferring not to intrude in any way into what was already for her a traumatic episode of her life.

Examples of the sorts of questions which can be answered¹:

What then, are the sorts of questions which QLR researchers can (and ought to) pose of their data. I list these in ordering of growing sophistication.

- What is different between t1 and t2?

A simple, but useful, way into analysing change is to attempt to assess what is different between two time periods. It must be remembered, however, that in early phases of the research, there will either be little change (since this may take time to occur) or little evidence of change (since several observations may be required to identify change). This way, over time, we can build up a notion of the general direction or trajectory of an individual's progression or career in that aspect of their life. For example, in studying people why people stopped offending, I classified each interviewer into one of a number of possible groups (see below).

- When do any changes occur? Which changes co-occur with or precede others?

¹ This section draws from Saldana, 2003.

Another good starting point is to try to discern when or following which processes or events changes occur or are initiated. This inevitably forces one to start to compare across cases. Similarly a consideration of co-causality or temporal orderings amongst multi-causal factors is an essential part of analysing such data.

- Are there any epiphanies, surges or ‘tipping points’?

Assuming that there are identifiable changes, another way of exploring the data is to look for sudden events (epiphanies) which trigger a change or which in some way initiate a process of change. Alternatively, there may be an acceleration of some sort (objective or subjective changes or developments) which build towards a change. There could also be a rough accumulation of properties of the individual or their experiences (e.g. ill health in a drug injecting career) which reach at level at which a decision is made (e.g. to seek medical help or to try to give up drug use).

- What increases/decreases over time?

Looking for accumulations (either of properties, experiences or values) in this fashion gives an idea to the general trajectory that an individual may be on. Similarly bearing in mind that individuals may also lose characteristics of their selves or their status is another way of approaching the data at hand. Loss of esteem amongst work colleagues (for example) may be the result of a sudden event (being caught behaving in a dishonest way, for example) or may be the result of a slow erosion of status and may follow a particular trajectory (being initially disliked but associated with, to being avoided to being shunned, for example). Be aware of path dependencies which may be the results of biases in the data set, however (that is trajectories that are likely

given a particular starting point), especially if one has sampled in a way which maximises homogeneity of respondents (e.g. snowballing).

- What is missing over time?

A consideration of what respondents have (or say during interviews) should not blind us to what they patently do not have or avoid taking about. There are certain social institutions (families, schooling, employment, retirement and so on) which many of us routinely deal with. However, not all of our respondents will have access to such groups and this absence (or past absence) may be important in understanding their later decisions and posture towards life. Similarly, avoidances of particular subjects or people may indicate topics which the respondent feels uncomfortable about but which may go some way in explaining current values or dispositions.

- What are the contextual processes that condition or influence changes and the timing of changes?

Not all respondents will undergo changes, and of those who do, there will be some who experience such changes later or earlier than others. In attempting to account for such changes, their absence or the timing of them, one must be aware of the contextual processes which impact upon these changes. For example, emotional investments in families amongst those who for some reason are unable to spend time with their families (through dint of work, marital separation or institutionalisation in secure units or prisons) may come at a different point in their lives from those who are able to spend time with their families. Similarly, the ways in which different ethnic groups structure their age-dependent expectations may cause differences which

emerge along ethnic lines or between different age cohorts of the same ethnic group if values change between the generations.

- Which changes oppose or support common processes of human development?

Some changes may help to support the commonly identified processes of human development, whilst others may disrupt or run counter to these. For example, divorce and a consequential reduction in the quality of one's housing situation may mean that some people in their middle age find themselves living in short-term rented accommodation alongside those who have yet to enter the housing market (e.g. recent entrants to the labour market). This might be thought of as a process which opposed (anticipated) human development. Similarly, long distance moves during early adulthood which threaten or reduce the salience to the individual of peer-based friendships might be thought of as supporting human development since these friendships might not be expected to survive into middle adulthood anyway.

- How meaningful to the respondent are any changes?

Of course, the above example (of long distance moves during early adulthood away from where one has grown up) may still prove to be painful or upsetting for the individual concerned since these may represent changes which they are uncertain about. Changes must always be understood as changes for the person undergoing them and be understood therefore from their perspective.

- Are changes substantive or symbolic?

One woman who I interviewed about the processes associated with her stopping offending reported that, after several promotions for her and after various shifts in her

managers and personnel working in the firm where she was now employed, *no one* there knew of her past convictions. Whilst this was substantively of little importance (since she was by then a valued and trusted employee) it was at one level very symbolic to her. She then knew that no one there would ever see her as the person who (at a previous firm) had stolen cash from the cash register or make decisions about her on this basis. It is always important to keep in mind the distinction between substantive changes and symbolic ones as their meanings are not always the same nor do these meanings have the same importance or the same 'life spans' of influence.

This list is not meant as a definitive list of questions and the questions have been deliberately framed in such a way as to be applicable to as many research topics as possible. These organising questions are by no means limited to those using QLR, but they certainly do represent good basic ways into the data for those embarking upon initial analyses of QLR data sets.

Some Basic Observations on QLR:

Before going on to outline in brief my own area of research which has drawn upon QLR, I wish to state blandly some basic observations about QLR. Some of these have been discussed in more detail above, others not.

- Change takes time to be initiated and completed and so changes will not be apparent in early data collection sweeps. Be patient during the first couple of waves of fieldwork.

- Careful thought needs to be given to interviews, so that the interviewing style does not become too repetitive or respondents conditioned to particular questions.
- However, a certain number of topics will be revisited in each data collection phase, and these need to be designed accordingly. Try to keep to a consistent ordering of events: deal first with the past (or the time since the previous interview), then with the present and lastly with the future.
- Interviews can be ‘tailor-made’ for each respondent by picking up on issues that they referred to in earlier interviews. But this is time-intensive. Sometimes, if the time between interviews has been extensive, it might be wise to remind respondents at the start of the interview what they were doing, where they were living and so on last time you saw them.
- An understanding of the different trajectories which an individual may have taken since the previous interviews is important (so that all possibilities are covered/prepared for). For example, six months into after a birth resulting from an unplanned pregnancy a 17 year old single mother could be in any one of these situations: having given the baby up for adoption; having access to the child who is being fostered with a view to adoption; as above but without Social Services or the mother having reached a decision about who should care for the child in the long term; living with the baby bringing the child up as their own; as above but being brought up as the child of another relative; living with the child and the child’s natural father; as above but with a new

partner; the child may have died. One needs to think ahead and have contingencies for all of these.

- Later interview sweeps need not collect as much basic demographic data – allowing more time for reflection on salient issues on the part of the respondent. As such, issues round their perceptions of causality or sequencing can be addressed.
- In order to recontact respondents, not only does one need their permission, but one also needs to know where they are likely to be and who to contact in order to help trace them. In this respect, the full names and addresses of relatives and friends are required. All data ought to be kept securely in line with the *Data Protection Act*.

An Exemplar: Charting The Effects of Probation Supervision on Offenders

In this section of the essay, I will outline briefly one study which relied upon QLR.

From the autumn of 1997, I led a research team which followed 199 men and women for the duration of their probation orders. We interviewed them all at the start of their orders (1-2 months into supervision), then again 6-7 months later (n= 137, around Summer-Autumn 1998) and towards the end of their orders (n= 120, around January-August 1999). Finally, we interviewed a quarter of them (n= 51) for a long-term outcomes study around 4-5 years later (Autumn 2003-Summer 2004, at this point our funding limited us to a budget which cover around 50 interviews). Their probation officers were also interviewed for the first three sweeps of interviews. The results of the project have been disseminated in a number of publications which have explored

the impact of probation on the lives of the sample members (Farrall, 2002a); absences from supervision (Farrall, 2002b); the relationship between victimisation and offending (Farrall & Maltby, 2003); evaluation research epistemologies (Farrall, 2003a & b); masculinities and desistance (Gadd & Farrall, 2004); social capital and desistance (Farrall, 2004); the relationship between self-reported, officer-reported and official measures of offending (Farrall, 2005a); the existential aspects of desistance (Farrall, 2005b); the emotional trajectories of desistance (Calverley & Farrall, forthcoming) as well as two book-length contributions (Farrall, 2002a, and Farrall & Calverley, 2005).

The study was first and foremost geared towards answering the question why do people stop offending after they have been on probation? What is of most importance, naturally occurring social and personal changes or the influence of their probation officer? Although most probationers showed signs of starting to stop offending, very few probationers (or their officers) attributed change in patterns of offending to their supervision (Farrall, 2002). At each wave of interviewing, we asked interviewees to report if they had committed any further offences. Their answers are given in Table One below.

Table One: Self-Reported Offending Waves 1-3

<u>Wave</u>	<u>Offended?</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
W1	yes	65 (of 199)	33
W2	yes	61 (of 137)	45
<u>W3</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>50 (of 120)</u>	<u>42</u>

This picture, initially makes for very disappointing reading. Although a third reported committing further offences since the start of their probation order at wave one, by W2 this had risen to 45%, where it appeared to plateau. However, this picture is

somewhat misleading. Initially, operationalisations of desistance employed by criminologists were based on certain assumptions - assumptions which are now felt to have been rather crude approaches to the topic at hand (Bushway *et al*, 2001). Bushway *et al* (2001) accuse Farrington and Hawkins (1991) of having defined desisters in their study as those who had been convicted before the age of 21, but were not convicted thereafter. Bushway *et al* argued that the age of 21 was derived from a desire to split the available data set into roughly two equal halves, rather than for any theoretical reason, and that this approach to operationalising desistance resulted in some people being classified as a persister for being convicted once at age 21, when in fact they may have had more in common with non-offenders or desisters. Such an approach, Bushway *et al* argued, did not adequately capture the *processes* associated with desistance.

Regardless of these definitional 'skirmishes', desistance is probably best approached as experienced by many as a process. (Of course, there will be some people for whom desistance is more like an event – see Cusson and Pinsoneault, 1986 for examples of 'shocking events' which led some in their sample to the decision to desist). Bearing in mind that desistance is not 'an event', the operationalisation of desistance I employed placed an emphasis on *gradual processes*. Such an operationalisation both better captures the true nature of desisting from offending - in which 'lulls' in offending, temporary resumption of offending and the such like are common - and provides a schema in which *reductions* in offence severity or the frequency with which offences were admitted to could be interpreted as indications of the *emergence* of desistance. An important feature of this schema was that it allowed for changes in offending *trajectories* which indicated a shift in patterns of offending *towards desistance* to be charted. This entailed careful examinations of each probationer's reports of all of their

offending at each sweep - the outline of the offence(s) committed, the amount of offences reported and the nature and severity of the offences. On this basis each probationer was classified into one of five groups: no offending; an offending trajectory which suggested he or she was desisting; continued trivial offending; continued non-trivial offending, and offending which was escalating. The extent to which those probationers seen to the ends of their order were judged to be in the process of desisting is reported in Table Two.

Table Two: Progress towards Desistance

	Number	Percentage
No offending	64	32
Showing signs of desisting	28	14
Continued Offending (trivial)	20	10
Continued Offending (non-trivial)	18	9
Continued Offending (escalating)	27	14
Impossible to code	42	21
Total	199	100

There were, in fact only 23 per cent (see the shaded rows) which were not showing some signs of stopping offending or committing trivial offences. Most of the probationers were either ‘slowing down’ in terms of their offending, were committing minor offences or had avoided trouble completely. However, in order to make this assessment, we needed to interview our sample prospectively.

Although few interviewees cited probation supervision as the explanation for their ceasing to offend during initial waves, somewhat against the expectations of the first three waves of interviewing, the fourth wave found some ex-probationers acknowledging previously unacknowledged help and guidance from their probation officers (Farrall & Calverley, 2005). It would appear, therefore, that probation

supervision ‘worked’ for these cases by providing them with advice, often however they are not ready to listen to or use this advice for some years. This was often due to the problems which characterised their lives at the time (and which took precedence). Since, in the main, most individual-level change is due to changes in personal and social circumstances (jobs and families), macro-level social policies have to be able to provide circumstances in which these changes are easier to make. There was an emotional aspect to stopping offending, and probationers appeared to go through a number of phases as they moved from being heavily-engaged in offending to being no longer engaged in offending (Calverley & Farrall, forthcoming). We were able to link structural processes to the lives of our respondents in order to explain some hitherto unexplored issues (such as the victim-offender overlap, Farrall & Calverley, 2005).

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LSE Methodology Institute

Discussion Papers - Qualitative Series

Editorial

The LSE Methodology Institute's Discussion Papers are an opportunity for visitors to the school, members of staff and invited speakers to the Institute's seminars to put forward an argument on qualitative methodology. The paper may be at an early stage inviting a swift first round of reviews. The papers are internally reviewed before they are accepted and then distributed within and outside the LSE for further discussions with the authors.

In this series we encourage contributions that propose **ideal-typical** descriptions of particular procedures for qualitative data collection and/or analysis, be these text, image or sound based. In an ideal world 'typifying' comprises a discussion of

- * the underlying concepts,
- * the strength and weaknesses of the method,
- * its comparison to similar approaches,
- * a discussion of good and bad use of the approach through using criteria such as reliability, transparency or others.
- * one or two exemplary results obtained with the method.
- * around 5000 words of length

Martin W Bauer

London, October 1996