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Designing and selecting qualitative samples : **‘The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men** **Gang aft a-gley’** **Robert Burns *To a Mouse***

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Structure



- Sampling strategies of qualitative research
- Key features of qualitative sampling
- Implementing sample design:
Autonomy, Rights and Children with
Special Needs: A New Paradigm?



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Importance of sampling strategy



- Qualitative samples are usually small because researcher is seeking **in-depth** understanding rather than **statistical generalisability**.
- But even in studies using small sample, or single case studies, important to state clearly criteria used in sample selection.
- Possible (but unusual) to use probability sampling in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012: 416).
- Most qualitative studies use non-probability sampling. Truth claims rest on in-depth understanding rather than statistical probability.



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Non-probability sampling commonly used in qualitative research



- Units selected to reflect particular features of, or groups within, the sampled population.
- Sample is **not** intended to be statistically representative – e.g. in a study of ASN pupils, a decision might be made to select equal numbers of boys and girls, even though this would not reflect their proportion within the ASN population.
- Aim is to reflect **key characteristics** of the study population.
- Qualitative sampling often misunderstood - may be criticised for its non-representative nature and inability to allow statistical generalisation.



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Our research adopted a purposive/criterion-based sampling approach



- Sample has particular characteristics which allow **research questions** to be explored.
- Central research question to be addressed: *In England and Scotland, to what extent is a new era of children and young people's autonomy/participation rights materialising in practice within the processes of decision-making and redress across the field of special educational needs and additional support needs?*



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Approach to purposive sampling adopted logic of heterogeneous sampling



Heterogeneous sampling strategy – Enables identification of similarities and differences across relevant groups e.g. groups of children with different types of difficulty, different levels of deprivation etc. (c.f. homogeneous sampling, critical case sampling, outlier sampling etc.)

Important to ensure that:

- (1) All key constituencies or types relevant to the subject matter are covered.
- (2) Sample is sufficiently diverse to allow research question(s) to be explored in depth.



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First, identified key messages from analysis of administrative data/ LA survey to be explored in case study research



Proportion of population identified as having ASN (additional support needs) in Scotland **increasing**, but proportion of those with CSP (statutory support plan) **decreasing** – & vice versa in England.

In Scotland, children living in **most deprived** areas (SIMD 1 & 2) **more likely** to have ASN identified, but **less likely** to have statutory support plan.

In Scotland, large increases in non-normative categories: social, emotional and behavioural difficulties; autistic spectrum disorder.

Big differences in ASN identification rates in Scotland & England & by Local Authority in both jurisdictions.



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Plan was to use similar sampling frame in England and Scotland – but differences between jurisdictions illustrate problems with comparative research



- SEN & ASN have different meanings & sub-categories are different – e.g. children with English as a second language are counted as having ASN in Scotland, but not in England
- In England, SEN categories are discrete – child's primary type of SEN is recorded. In Scotland, categories are not discrete – all difficulties are recorded & there is no 'primary difficulty'.
- Deprivation is not measured in the same way – SIMD & IMD have some differences in their components, but are the best comparative measures.
- England mainly uses free school meal entitlement – not used in Scotland
- Differences in types of school & school governance in England and Scotland



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Sampling frame (deliberately not too prescriptive)



- Selection of 3 Local Authorities in England & 3 in Scotland
- Within each LA, **eight case studies** of children and young people with SEN/ASN in different family/care and school contexts (**48 in total; 24 in each jurisdiction**).
- Case studies focus on four most common overall official categories of SEN/ASN
- In each authority, two case studies (1 primary age, 1 secondary age) for each of these four categories of SEN/ASN.
- In addition, children drawn from different deprivation quintiles, ethnic groups and age groups, and reflect a gender balance.
- Cases drawn from different types of school (local authority maintained mainstream and special; academies (England only); other special schools).



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Simple case study selection framework



	LA1	LA2	LA3
Social, emotional & behavioural difficulties	1 primary 1 secondary	1 primary 1 secondary	1 primary 1 secondary
Autistic spectrum disorder	1 primary 1 secondary	1 primary 1 secondary	1 primary 1 secondary
Communication & speech difficulties	1 primary 1 secondary	1 primary 1 secondary	1 primary 1 secondary
Learning disabilities	1 primary 1 secondary	1 primary 1 secondary	1 primary 1 secondary



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How did things work out in practice? Summary tables England



	Bigtown	Northshire	Greenshire	Total No.	%
GENDER					
Male	3	5	3	11	61
Female	3	1	3	7	39
ETHNICITY					
White British	4	5	6	15	83
African Caribbean	1	0	0	1	6
Japanese British	0	1	0	1	6
Pakistani British	1	0	0	1	6
AGE					
Primary	3	2	3	8	44
Secondary	2	1	1	4	22
16-24	1	3	2	6	33
Primary SEN					
SEMH	2	2	1	5	28
MLD	1	1	1	3	17
ASD	2	2	1	5	28
SLCN	0	0	1	1	6
SpLD	0	1	1	2	11
Sensory Needs	1	0	1	2	11
FSME	4	0	2	6	33
LAC	1	2	0	3	17
EHCP	5	6	4	15	83



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	Bigtown	Northshire	Greenshire	No of cases	% of cases
IMD quintile					
1	4	2		6	33
2			1	1	6
3	1		3	4	22
4	1	1	2	4	22
5		3		3	17
Family Composition					
Lone parent	1	0	2	3	N/A
Foster Care	0	2	0	2	N/A
Leaving Care	1	0	0	1	N/A
Disabled parent	0	1	0	1	N/A
Parent/Carer/YP Occupation					
1-3: Professional/manager	2	3	1	6	33
4-5: Admin/skilled trade	2	1	4	7	39
6-7: Sales/service		1	1	2	11
8-9: Manual					
Unemployed	2	1		3	17



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	Bigtown	Northshire	Greenshire	Total No of cases	% of cases
Mainstream primary	2	1	1	4	22
Resourced Provision within mainstream Primary	1			1	6
LA Maintained, Special Primary		1	2	3	17
Mainstream secondary Academy	2			2	11
Independent Special Secondary School		1		1	6
LA Maintained Special Secondary School			1	1	6
Mainstream FE College			2	2	11
SEN unit in Mainstream College		2		2	11
Independent, Special FE College (Residential)		1		1	6
Supported Internship	1			1	6



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Categorisation of difficulties more complex in Scotland



Type Difficulties	Sea City	Eastshire	Coalshire
<p>Glossary ASD = Autistic Spectrum Disorder LDs = Learning disabilities; PDs = Physical disabilities; SEBD = Social, emotional & behavioural difficulties LAC = Looked After Child ADHD = Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder</p>	<p>Case 1: ASD, LDs Case 2: PDs, LDs Case 3: PDs, LDs Case 4: Dyslexia Case 5: SEBD, LAC Case 6: SEBD, LAC Case 7: PDs, LDs</p>	<p>Case 1: ASD Case 2: ASD, ADHD, LD Case3: ASD, SEBD Case 4: ASD, PDs Case 5: PDs, LDs Case 6: PDs Case 7: ASD, ADHD, LDs</p>	<p>Case 1: ASD Case 2: ASD Case 3: ASD Case 4: MLD, ADHD Case 5: PDs, LDs Case 6: PDs, LDs Case 7: ASD, CSL Communication, Speech and Language</p>



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Other complexities in Scotland



- Boundary between mainstream & special in Scotland increasingly eroded – many children with name on mainstream roll spend most of time in special unit.
- Status of support plans increasingly unclear.
- Diagnosis of difficulty increasingly haphazard & unreliable
- So was our sampling frame completely useless?



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Have to acknowledge that purposive sampling strategy often includes elements of convenience/opportunistic/snowball sampling



- Access controlled by gatekeepers
- Participants must opt in – self-selection bias
- Further constraints include researcher time, deadlines etc.
- Sometimes researchers do not fully acknowledge use of convenience sampling – strong arguments for more systematic approach but doesn't always work in practice.
- Difficulties in purposive sampling underline importance of mixed methods approach – quantitative work provides broad picture but does not answer the why? questions. Qualitative research provides deeper understanding – but works with messy social reality.