Worksheet – Data without Context

Read this after reading the interview excerpt with Grandmother 19. Are you surprised at any of the information? What did you expect, and how does this information change the way you would analyse the interview? Does the methodology and research questions match your own ideas for how the data could be used?

Interview Notes for Interview with Grandmother 19

Date interview: 1978

Age of G19: 43

[text has been edited slightly to remove identifiers.]

Upstairs flat in drab block of 4. Untidy. Back garden overgrown grass. A daughter with baby living with parents. Doesn't appear to be married. Another daughter who is pregnant was also present. Not sure whether she is living there also. A teen aged daughter also lives at home. The 2 daughters present looked gaunt and ill. Son-in-law came in later and left granddaughter - seemed to be about 4 or 5. G19 seemed quite forthcoming despite the presence of all these people. But when I was leaving she showed me to the door and confided that she and [someone of her daughter's generation] were very different: "Although she's a nice person, she was brought up on the good things of life. She likes to get out and enjoy herself, while I only thought of my family."

Methodology of the Study

The aim of Blaxter and Patterson's (1982) research was to study inter-generational transmission of deprivation using a sample of women in 58 three-generation families and was part of a larger ESRC programme on Transmitted Deprivation. Sampling was purposive: families that remained working class across two generations, grandmother-daughter co-location in a Scottish city, and continuing contact. The study addressed diverse factors, exploring whether health and social histories, attitudes, and health behaviours would

affect the health experiences of the children and were possibly transmitted across generations. Nutrition was one of the several topics addressed; others were orientations toward medicine, antenatal care, preventative behaviour, use of lay remedies, etc. The study used several types of data: information from longitudinal visits with the mothers, health visitor reports, etc. Other data, including semi-structured interview, focused on attitudes and perceptions. The original study was intended to inform social policy.

A year after publish their book, Blaxter and Patterson re-analysed their data to study the historical and moral significance of food. They reported on what constituted 'good food': specific foods were less important than a 'proper' meal, as contrasted with processed foods, or 'snackery'. They also used their rich intergenerational data to compare the different attitudes and behaviours between grandmothers and their daughters.

Interviews were done by two educated, white women. Patterson did the majority of the grandmother interviews. She was from the same area where the families lived. Blaxter praised her ability to gain rapport with the respondents. The study was presented to the respondent as being about child-rearing and child-rearing beliefs and practices across generations. There had been regular visits to the families by either Blaxter or Patterson; mothers were interviewed at the end of the six-month study.