

Thematic guide: health studies (using qualitative data)

Have affected the way society views health

The study of health and illness is diverse and complex.

Researchers in this field have debated issues of social change and the ways in which it has challenged the traditional approaches to health and illness.

In particular the proliferation of new technologies designed to modify the human body and significant medical advances have affected the way society views health and how individuals subjectively experience their bodies.

Some of the historical changes that have occurred in health care are examined in Blaxter's classic study 'Mothers and Daughters: Accounts of Health in the Grandmother Generation, 1945-1978'.

Another view is provided by Gittens' study on 'Severalls Hospital: Interviews for 'Madness in its Place', 1913-1997'. It gives fascinating insight into life in a large psychiatric hospital in Essex and a social history of British psychiatric care in the twentieth century. The picture above is one of many from an extensive collection of photos archived with this collection.

Health studies research has also been used to inform and improve current health care practices and health care management. An empirical analysis of the policy process in the NHS was carried out in Exworthy and Powell's study, 'Understanding Health Variations and Policy Variations, 1999', in which they examined how policies on health inequality were developed, instigated and evaluated.

UK Data Service has web pages to aid researchers looking for data specifically on [health and health behaviour](#).

Searching for related materials

The [UK Data Service catalogue](#) can be searched for data on health studies using subject terms such as:

- Mental illness
- Health risks
- Hospitals
- Medical care
- Medical profession
- Sexual behaviour
- Drug abuse
- Ethics

Every data collection is accompanied by comprehensive documentation. These are open access and available to the public from the website and it is not necessary to be a registered user to access and download them.

The content of the documentation varies by collection, but usually includes information such as the initial proposal, interview schedule, description of methodology, end of award report, and so on. In some cases more details are provided, such as the coding schemes of the original researchers or examples of the consent forms used.

Other resources on health studies

[Centre for Public Policy and Health - University of Durham](#)

[Institute of Medical and Social Care Research](#)

[Joint Information Services Council \(JISC\)](#)

[Medical Research Council](#)

[World Health Organisation](#)

Summary of selected qualitative studies on health

Study name

[SN 4943 Mothers and Daughters: Accounts of Health in the Grandmother Generation, 1945-1978](#)

Blaxter, M.

This enhanced qualitative collection looked at the beliefs and attitudes to health and medical care, inter-generational relationships, and the social history of members of a grandmother generation. Grandmothers were asked extensive questions about their own health and the health of other family members.

Coverage

Sample: women in a Scottish city who had a child between 1950-1953

Data: 46 interviews

Topics

- child care
- elderly
- family life
- gender role
- health

Study name

[SN 4572 Understanding Health Variations and Policy Variations, 1999](#)

Exworthy, M. and Powell, M. A.

This study undertook an empirical analysis of the policy process in the NHS in order to examine how policy towards health inequalities is formulated and how that policy is translated vertically into local policy. How and why local policies differ within health authorities and other agencies was also considered, and how these initiatives are evaluated at the local level.

Coverage

Sample: stakeholders in health authorities and health policy groups.

Data: 44 interviews

Topics

- attitudes

- health services
- local government
- policy making

Study name

[SN 6124 Being a Doctor: a Sociological Analysis, 2005-2006](#)

Nettleton, S.

This project investigated the views and day-to-day experiences of medical clinicians and examined how they are being shaped by ongoing social, policy, organisational, and technological transformations. It was an exploratory study which aimed to develop a sociological understanding of the views and experiences of doctors working within the National Health Service.

Coverage

Sample: doctors working in the North of England, 2005-2006

Data: 50 interviews

Topics

- employment
- health services
- local government
- policy making

Study name

[SN 6111 Doing Embryo Ethics: Safety and Efficacy in Research and Practice, 2004-2007](#)

Kerr, A.

This qualitative project explored the social and discursive construction of ethics in research laboratories and clinics working with human embryos. The study contributed towards understanding scientific governance in contemporary society, focusing upon the multiple ways in which ethics are played out in the clinic and the laboratory, and the relationships between these types of 'everyday ethics' and ethical discourses in other professional, political and public domains.

Coverage

Sample: staff working in assisted conception units and embryo research laboratories.

Data: 13 interviews assisted conception

Topics

- health
- ethics
- embryos
- science and technology

Study name

[SN 4890 Severalls Hospital: Interviews for 'Madness in its Place', 1913-1997](#)

Gittins, D.

This research is based on the life stories of patients and workers at a large psychiatric hospital in Essex and presents a social history of British psychiatric care in the twentieth century. This collection is archived with an extensive collection of photographs and architectural plans of the hospital.

Coverage

Sample: past and present Severalls' staff and patients

Data: 30 interviews (plus 56 image files)

Topics

- hospitals
- mental health
- institutions
- health
- medical history

Study name

[SN 5371 Young Men, Masculinities and Health, 2003-2004](#)

De Visser, R. and Smith, J. A.

The aim of this study was to explore the influence of men's beliefs about masculinity on their social behaviour, particularly relating to their health. Rather than making the assumption that masculinity is 'bad' for men's health, this study sought to interrogate the links between masculinity and health, and to see whether masculinity is a 'package deal' of behaviours, or whether men are able to forge their own identities and their own patterns of masculine (and non-masculine) behaviour.

Coverage

Sample: young men resident in London during 2003-2004

Data: 31 interview transcripts and 5 focus group transcripts

Topics

- health
- gender roles
- youth
- masculinity
- identity