

Doing case studies for the refugee sector

A DIY handbook for agencies and practitioners

By Lea Esterhuizen

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About the author

Lea Esterhuizen has spent the past eight years innovating, teaching, and consulting about methods appropriate for researching violence and refugees in South Africa and Britain. She aims to contribute to confidence and capacity-building in the delivery of rigorous research and evidence-based theory in these areas, and to inspire audiences about the creative potential of social research. She lives in London with her partner Kemal and Lola-the-cat.

About the project

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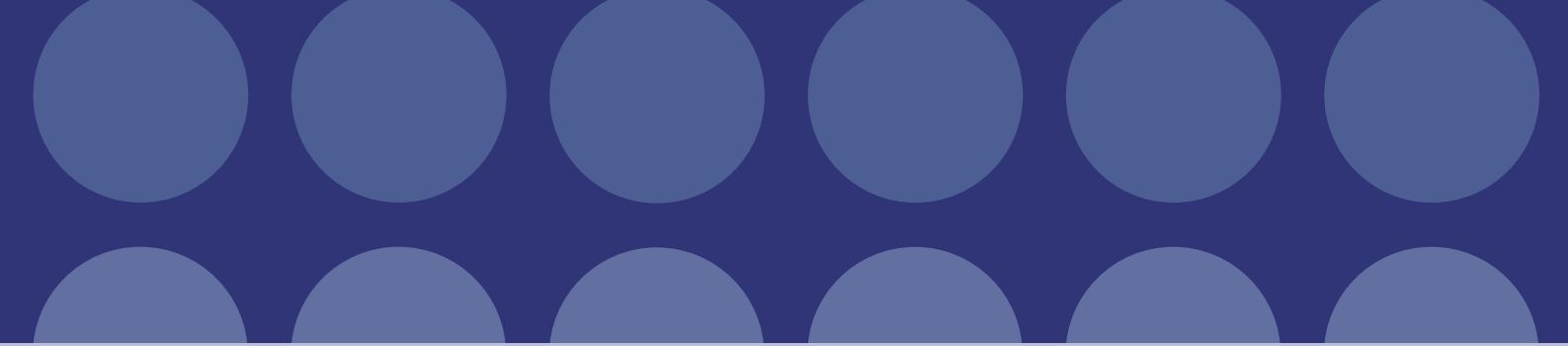
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I Introduction

In the course of our everyday lives, we digest many case studies. These are short non-fictional stories cited in meetings, newspaper articles, reports, and in conversation. We ourselves use case studies all the time in conversation and in supporting a particular point we want to make about a community of people, a social issue, the nature of a relationship, or when we believe we need to justify a particular request or need.

In the process of learning about and supporting refugees and asylum seekers in the UK today, we have an obligation to use such stories as rigorously as we can to ensure that our audience, whether this is made up of journalists, service providers, funders, the public, or refugees and asylum seekers themselves, understand the significance of this particular story, as well as where this particular person's or family's story fits into a bigger picture.

This handbook aims to do just that – to offer you practical knowledge to answer the following questions:

- When in our work with refugees and asylum seekers can we use case studies?
- Which of the cases we hear every day can be used most effectively for which purposes?
- What questions should we ask and which details should we note when we meet a particular client whose story can be used as a case study?
- What do we do with the case study material once we have collected it?
- What legitimate expectations do the following people have from a case study:
 - the client who offers their story?
 - the case worker who works on the case?
 - the manager who supervises the casework and liaises with advocacy and research staff?
 - the research officer?
 - the advocacy and media officer?
 - the funder?
 - the policy maker?
 - the journalist?
 - the public?
 - the refugee?
 - the asylum seeker?
 - the academic?
- How can we present a case study which is not only moving, but accurate and informative about a particular set of circumstances as well as a broader population of cases?
- What questions should we bear in mind when we are reading or hearing a case study?
- What differentiates a 'good' case study from a 'bad' case study?
- How can we respond to a 'bad' case study?
- How can we use 'good' case studies to counter 'bad' case studies?

How to use the handbook

Sections one to six provide you with a general understanding of case studies, their strengths and weaknesses, and their particular applicability to the refugee sector. Sections seven to 17 provide you with some practical information on how to do case studies, from learning to recognise a case, to gathering, analysing, and presenting case studies in different contexts. It is this middle part of the handbook which will probably prove most useful to those of you interested in the particular choices and suggestions about case study work which relate to your specific function within an agency or organisation – for example, as a casework manager, an advocacy officer, or a fundraiser. Sections 18 to 20 provide you with some general standards of good practice to consider when either doing your own case studies or when evaluating case studies that others have done. Section 21 provides a summary, section 22 a good case study checklist, and section 23 a recommended reading list. Appendix A is an example of a case study. There is also a glossary and an index.

About the examples used

It should be stated from the outset that all the case study material and examples used in this handbook are entirely fictitious and bear no direct relation to real projects or cases.

2 A note on the sector in which we work

UK refugee and asylum issues are controversial. Those of us engaged in casework, research, campaigning, and fundraising in this sector need to recognise that our work involves sensitivity. This sensitivity arises from issues of social exclusion, the spectrum of public attitudes and public opinion about, and assumptions concerning refugees and asylum seekers. With this sensitivity comes a greater need for us to consider seriously our ethical responsibility to produce sound research and information about this group of people.

For the sake of the credibility of the research and information we generate, we need to ground all the statements we make in evidence rather than making assumptions that immediately locate our organisations and our work on an unforgiving political spectrum. To do so will also mean that the case studies, together with any other sources of information we generate, will be more reliable and harder to dismiss.

Summary: Political volatility around issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers means that we need to apply rigour to producing case studies that will be a reliable source of information and that can withstand attack. Our best defence? Evidence!

3 What is a case study?

A case study is a story about what happened to a particular individual, family, group, or organisation in a particular set of circumstances. The individual, family, group, or organisation that we select forms our case. But case studies always also contain contextual information, including past experiences, circumstances, and conditions which assist the audience to understand the background of a case.

For example, let's say we want to study refugee experiences of applying for British citizenship. A case would be an individual's experience of doing so, and the context would include that individual's motivations, such as future aspirations relating to marriage, children, employment, and place of residence, together with other relevant contextual factors.

Case studies usually draw on different sources of evidence.

For example, this time we are interested in mental health needs amongst asylum seekers in detention. We may initially only think of collecting information from the individual detainee her/himself using interviews. But we should also include information gathered from health and mental health professionals who have had contact with the detainee, anonymised information about life experiences in her/his country of origin and journey to the UK, and perhaps even information from friends and relatives who knew the detainee prior to their detention.

A case study is usually presented in the form of a 'story' – a detailed description of a particular individual or group contextualised in space and time. So, in the case of research concerning refugees and asylum seekers, more often than not the case would be presented in the form of a story about an individual asylum seeker, refugee, or asylum seeking or refugee family.

But on a larger scale, a case could also be a particular refugee community organisation, a particular service provider, a particular refugee agency, or another less formally constituted social group such as a friendship network, which also has a particular identity and context.

What is a case study

Summary: A case study is the study of a concrete social unit (usually individuals or families) in context. The method involves answering a specific question by drawing on different sources of information. Case studies are usually presented in the form of stories.

4 Why can't we just work with numbers?

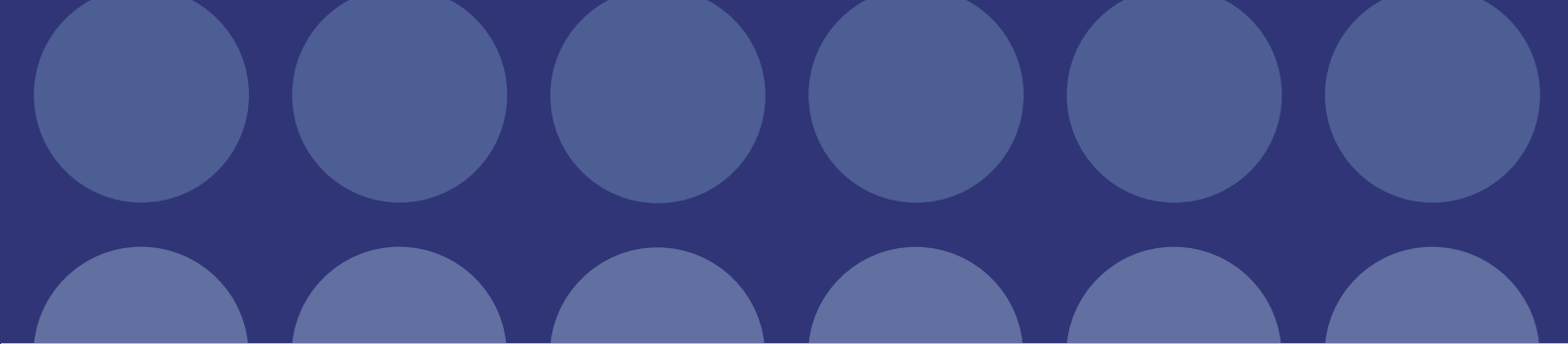
It is true that we still live in a world in which 'the number is king'. Newspapers, government reports, and campaigns provide counts of different social 'things' in order to emphasise the extent of a particular problem or trend. Indeed, local and national government bodies need quantitative information to decide which areas and sections of the population are most in need. However, we are conditioned to believe very strongly in the truth-value of statistics. After all, if we have the numbers, what more could we need?

To begin with, when dealing with what researchers term 'invisible populations' such as refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, these statistics are always approximate, however rigorously they have been gathered and analysed. An 'invisible population' is not really a population at all, it is a situation. Such a situation comes about when we can't be certain about the nature of a particular group of people – for instance how many people make up the group or any details about their past or current lives.

For example, for a variety of reasons we don't know how many asylum seekers and refugees there are in the UK, where they come from, where they live now, whether they are working and the kinds of work they do, how they are supporting themselves, their infrastructural and health needs, etc.

Most statistics that claim to describe the population of either refugees or asylum seekers in the UK (except statistics like the asylum application statistics produced by the Home Office) are 'inferential statistics'. This means that they make statements about all refugees or asylum seekers on the basis of a selected sample. The minimum requirement that should be met before inferring something about a population on the basis of a sample is that you know how many cases there are in total – that you have a sampling frame. No such sampling frame exists for asylum seekers and refugees. The census does not ask people to identify their immigration status, and Home Office asylum statistics, the most comprehensive data source on asylum seekers, only relate to the number of asylum applications made and does not record what happens to people once they are given permission to stay. Refugees may also choose not to describe themselves as refugees, and can also change their status and become British citizens. For these reasons and others, the prospect of achieving a comprehensive list of refugees is very difficult. So in practical terms both asylum seekers and refugees constitute invisible populations and statistics about them in the UK as a whole have certain limitations.

But statistics, even when they do not concern 'invisible populations', are better at answering some kinds of questions than others. When we want to know the extent of a well-defined problem, then we ask a "how much/how many" question. But what if we don't know enough about the nature of a particular situation? Official statistics in particular can be quite rigid and are therefore not necessarily the most effective source of information when we need to ask "how" questions – how are a certain group of people



living, how has a particular service or intervention impacted on their lives, how has a particular set of needs changed over time? This is where the case study has a contribution to make.

Why can't we just work with numbers?

Summary: Refugees and asylum seekers in the UK constitute invisible populations. Most statistics, especially national statistics about refugees and asylum seekers, are approximate. Statistics are better at telling us to what extent something well-defined happens than they are at exploring how something ill-defined or new happens.

5 Case studies can give us...

Like statistics, case studies have strengths and weaknesses. Some of the weaknesses can be overcome by using case studies together with other sources of information and data (see “Combining case studies with other forms of data” page 43). But what case studies do offer is:

accessible stories

Traditionally case studies are presented, if not also gathered, in the form of narrative or detailed descriptions. In our sector case studies are often stories about what happened to a particular refugee or asylum seeker when a certain policy was implemented or when some other change took place. These descriptions are either made up of a series of accounts which are then reconfigured into a single story integrating different view points, or, less commonly, a single account taken from a single person. Either way when we work with case studies we are working with stories.

This is important for two main reasons. One of the biggest advantages of case study work is that we are offered in-depth insights into a particular situation. This means that we get to know the gritty details which when considered together, rather than described in terms of abstract statistics and variables, offer us insight into a situation as a whole and as it is in reality.

The second advantage relates to the way in which we have been socialised into using the story as a means of communicating information about everyday life from the moment we learn how to speak. When we present case studies as stories, because we are presenting an issue in the context of a life, we are encouraging the audience to relate to this story as a living one featuring everyday practices, concerns, and needs to which they can relate as fellow human beings and storytellers. This doesn't allow individual readers and listeners to distance themselves in the same way that an abstract statistic or statement cloaked in legislative or policy jargon does.

We must learn to make the most of the contextual depth and power to move an audience offered by case studies.

specifics

When we are working in a sector which includes a very wide spectrum of groups from different socio-political and geographic backgrounds, generalisations are dangerous. The more detail we require on the differences between as well as commonalities across such a heterogenous sector of the UK population, the more we need specifics.

But specific information about, for example, housing, employment, education, or medical care, is insufficient. We need to understand how these different circumstances and needs intersect to explain and influence one another. The questions we often ask are very specific, and case studies offer an effective way of providing equally specific answers.

For example, how do pregnant women detainees experience detention? How is it that asylum seekers and refugees dispersed to Manchester and Leeds end up in Leicester? How can we account for the differences between resident responses to the expansion of a Bosnian refugee community in Birmingham and Newcastle?

context

Answering specific questions demands information about context. This is information about the concrete circumstances in which people find themselves. But context also provides integrated information – information about the whole picture and not just isolated facts such as age, gender, or category of housing needed.

For example, if our specific question is ‘How is it that asylum seekers and refugees dispersed to Manchester and Leeds end up in Leicester?’, then a carefully selected set of case studies would help us to illustrate the different socio-economic and political contexts in which asylum seekers and refugees either choose to settle or are encouraged to settle in Leicester. It is only once we have this contextual information that we could effectively answer the question. Here it would be useful to include contextual data and information gathered from sources other than the client, such as local authorities and landlords in the three areas.

But if we were only to focus on gathering information about housing, for example, we would not be equipped to answer this question fully. We would also not be equipped to recognise why a particular situation has emerged and which other service providers we can work with to improve the situation faced by a particular group of clients.

Case studies offer us an integrated picture of what is happening to a client group by referring to the experiences of living breathing human cases. They do this by providing us with context which tells us how a particular client or family’s situation developed.

For example, let’s say we were aiming to answer the specific question “What are the initial vocational choices made by employed refugees living in London?” and we have selected five different cases. Given enough time and access, some of the contextual information collected could include information about previous education and training, work experience and status in country of origin, career aspirations, number of dependants, and knowledge of UK labour market, as well as experiences of service provision and support concerning employment and training opportunities in London.



clients' responses

Case studies constitute a valuable opportunity to learn not only about tangible physical and infrastructural context but also about the perceptual context – how people think and feel. Gathering and using clients' perceptions about a particular situation and accommodating these in the design of programmes can mean the difference between success and failure. By doing this we learn not only about the choices individuals make and the ways they behave, but about the motivations for these choices and behaviours. This will help us to understand and evaluate past and present projects, and might also inform future ones.

What case studies can give us

Summary: Case studies are an effective way of using accessible stories that provide information about context and clients' responses, in order to answer specific questions.

6 Case studies can't give us...

representativeness across the sector

Working with refugees and asylum seekers means accepting the fact that we will not be able to make claims or develop a complete understanding about our client population, or even about all the members of a particular refugee or asylum seeker community. By recognising this, we are also recognising that, when seeking to communicate representativeness for the whole sector, case studies will fall short.

For example, if we don't even know the most basic information about all Somali refugees such as how many there are at the time of doing a project, let alone information about demography and lifestyles, then how can we present the specific characteristics or responses of Somali case x as a representative case?

In order to say that a particular case is representative, we need to be sure that the characteristics of that case match a series of trends apparent in the population of, for example, asylum seekers as a whole. But we don't at present have access to those trends for either refugees or asylum seekers for the whole of the UK.

There are two ways of overcoming this challenge. Either we use what we refer to as a typical case in place of where we would like to have used a representative case or, in the case of projects concerning only the cases dealt with by our organisation, we can use representativeness if it is narrowly defined (typical and representative cases are discussed under "Different types of cases and how to select them" page 29).

For example, if the project is concerned with evaluating the way in which a particular service has been provided, then we can generate descriptive statistics which tell us about the main trends across all the cases who have accessed our service, which will then guide our search for a representative case.

generalisability across the sector

As with representativity, generalisability – the ability to say something about an entire population of cases on the basis of a sample of cases – is possible only when you have at least a limited knowledge of all the cases across the population. As is the case with representativity, this minimum standard cannot be met with refugees and asylum seekers.

But there is another reason why we can't generalise on the basis of case study work. When we do case studies we work with just a few cases in depth. This means that even if we do know the exact size of a refugee or asylum seeker population, we still don't have a large enough sample size to support a generalisation made on the basis of our case studies. We don't talk about samples in case study work, because this would imply that we are working with large numbers of case studies, when in fact to do so would be counter-

productive. In research work, we always have to trade off generalisability for depth, and the point of the case study is to provide the latter. However, if we do want to generalise on the basis of cases, it is better to generalise about service users within an organisation and to avoid generalising about the population as a whole.

For example, we cannot say that all Eritrean asylum seekers have housing needs inconsistent with the housing services provided in the large cities of the UK on the basis of a case study or even several case studies.

However when our population of cases is taken exclusively from our organisation's client base, then of course we can expect to be able to generalise. But even now our confidence in the suitability of applying a generalisation across all the cases we have on file, known as the confidence interval, must be high, and we must still work with a large number of case studies.

an answer to the question: "to what extent?"

Again, the lack of basic information about how many cases there are in the UK and any trends that might exist across them means that we cannot answer questions that ask 'To what extent does x happen?' But, as explained above, this limitation does not apply if the case studies are limited to the cases we have on file. However, a survey of all of these would have to be undertaken, requiring a combination of case study and survey work. This will be discussed under "Combining case studies with other forms of data" below (see page 43).

What case studies can't give us

Summary: Because refugees and asylum seekers constitute invisible populations, we cannot present a case as representative or generalise about a national, regional, or even local population on the basis of that single case. We also cannot determine to what extent a particular case is demonstrating what is happening in a broader population. But these problems can be overcome if we are working only with the cases we have on file.

7 How do we recognise a case?

Many assume that a case is simply an individual client, who at some point has approached a service provider or registered with an organisation, which as a result holds certain information about her/his needs, circumstances, and service provision experiences. But this is just one possibility.

Here are a few others. A case can also be:

- a family
- a minority group
- an interest group
- a project or service
- a time period
- a geographical area
- a cohort/age group
- a client group served by a particular organisation or agency.

Multiple cases can be very effective when used wisely, but be careful when gathering information about cases defined by more than one member. Gather a variety of perspectives on the relevant issue or experience from within the group, and try to present the commonalities as well as the differences. Think of your family as a unit: would your father serve as an appropriate spokesperson when being interviewed about safe sex service provision in your neighbourhood? In this case would your family be an appropriate case or would individuals not serve as a better level on which to define the case? Often less is more, and less is most certainly less complicated!

How do we recognise a case?

Summary: We often assume that a case is a synonym for an individual about whom information is systematically collected. But a case can also be a group of individuals, defined by family or other bonds. However such a case is more complicated, because we need to include any inconsistent perspectives existing within the group.

8 When can we use case studies?

Case studies can be used in most instances in which we need to find or work with evidence. Often we need to either find out what happens in a given situation, or how a particular group of clients experience a change in policy, service provision, or a particular set of circumstances. So whether we need to explore, explain, or illustrate something, case studies can be very useful.

The functions of case studies in the context of work with refugees and asylum seekers can be organised under six main headings:

- evaluating projects and services
- exploring new areas or under-researched areas
- explaining what is happening within an organisation or client group
- monitoring change
- lobbying
- fundraising

Clearly these areas overlap, however for the sake of clarity we will deal with each one of these functions separately.

using case studies to evaluate what we do

Every organisation needs to evaluate the effectiveness of what it has been doing, and to examine what changes should be made in order to improve its capacity to meet the needs of its clients. Both these functions lend themselves to case study work in different ways.

Programme evaluation involves examining a service that an organisation or agency has been providing or a function that has been carried out, in order to assess whether the service or function has been effective in meeting its objectives. In such instances we often look at representative or typical cases (see “Different types of cases and how to select them” page 29). But most organisations aim not only to meet the needs of an average or typical client, but to meet those of all their clients. This is where deviant cases become important.

A deviant case is a case which is neither average nor typical, but which stands out as unusual when compared to the other cases with which the organisation is familiar. Deviant cases can often teach us more about the shortcomings in our service or project than the representative or typical cases can. This is because the deviant case is our means of testing whether a particular intervention or project is covering all possible needs – within the relevant area – that a client may have. A deviant case frequently shows us areas in which adjustments need to be made to accommodate unanticipated needs or circumstances.

If a given program or service is seen to be meeting its objectives in both typical and deviant cases, we can report that it is working and use these cases as evidence. But we need to be very careful in the way we select the cases. This will be discussed in “Different types of cases and how to select them” (see page 29).

Another way of evaluating whether a project or service has been successful is to use a 'before-after' approach. This is discussed in detail in "using case studies to monitor change" (see page 20).

using case studies to explore something new

When embarking on a new area of service provision or encountering a new set of clients, case studies can teach us a lot in a short amount of time and using minimal resources. This is because a small set of well-selected cases can teach us about the primary commonalities and differences across a set of cases, as well as the ways in which different factors affect each other in the setting in which we want to work. This exploratory method offers us a lot for a little – though there are of course limits to what case studies can do for us. This was discussed in "Case studies can't give us..." (see page 15).

The secret to using case studies to explore something new lies in selecting cases carefully. But this process depends on how much we know about all the cases that exist, taken as a whole. We can simply randomly select a series of cases. But we can also, if we know the predominant trends across a population – even if it is only the 'population' of cases we have on file – select a number of cases that share characteristics typical to the population as a whole. The exact number of cases we work with will be determined by resource constraints (time, staffing etc) and the depth to which we wish to explore a given situation. We can also, given a particular focus, select a number of instrumental cases. Instrumental cases are those selected on the basis of suiting a particular purpose. These are different from typical cases because they are not selected because their characteristics tally with the predominant characteristics noted across an entire population of cases.

For example, if we know that the average Somali refugee living in Leicester is 28, male, and urban, then we would do well to select a typical case sharing these characteristics. But if we are wanting to explore gender differences, then we could select two instrumental cases, a man and a woman.

But with exploratory work it is also wise to examine a spectrum of cases, or at least a series of cases which at face value appear to offer insight into different circumstances. This ensures that we can at least get a preliminary sense of common and less common experiences of the same policy or service. So, in the example above, if we want to explore gender differences in need amongst Somali refugees in Leicester, it would make sense to select an equal number of men and women, and to represent different age groups, levels of education, urban versus rural origins, and other socio-demographic factors which we might anticipate would yield differences in experience.

using case studies to explain why

Some people believe that case studies can only be used to illustrate a point or to explore a situation before conducting larger scale research such as a survey. This is not true. Case studies offer a depth of insight which helps us to understand the particular context and to explain why one client may be responding well to an intervention while another may be responding badly.

For example, we have gathered together and analysed our casework data relating to a counselling service we have been providing to clients who sought asylum following genocide in their native country. Two findings from our casework data are puzzling. The average age of those using the service is far lower than we expected (23), and there is a far greater number of women than men making use of the service. Our original assumption had been that older men would have the greatest need for the service, and would therefore constitute the primary user group.

So we select a group of eight clients who we intend to approach for an account of their experiences and responses. We plan to gather case study material from four sets of two: one male and female under 30 using the service; one from each gender between 31 and 65 using the service; a mixed-gender pair of under-30 non-users; and a mixed-gender pair of over-30 non-users.

A comparison across our case studies reveals that our original assumption – that need would translate directly into usage of the service – was incorrect. We had failed to understand the perception, more pronounced amongst men over 30, but which was also described by the women over 30, that the need for counselling was an indication of mental instability and that public acknowledgment of that need was shameful.

While we would have to undertake a much larger scale study to confirm these perceptions as the cause of this skewed distribution of age and gender, we can in the meantime use this case study material to contextualise this finding. Such individual accounts are invaluable in at least tentatively explaining why something unexpected is happening in casework data.

using case studies to monitor change

Everything changes over time. This claim holds true for any project or service, however long-term and consistent in its approach. This is because even when the project, service, or intervention remains consistent over time, both our clients and the broader circumstances in which we work – such as political and economic climates and migration patterns – will change over time. So it makes sense for any organisation or agency, regardless of whether they provide services, information, or produce a particular set of goods, to be aware of such changes in order to optimise the relevance and effectiveness of the work they do.

Case study work can help keep an organisation informed about change.

For example, let's imagine that we are an agency providing information to service providers about the educational service needs of refugees in a particular city. We need to monitor changes in English language usage and training needs across our clientele and over time. So we decide to do what's called a longitudinal case study – a study of, most often, the same cases, at different intervals over a period of time.

We select two families from each of the three refugee groups dominating our casework. One of the two families selected from each of the communities needs to be either childless or with children living in another county. The other family must include two parents with a child or children still living at home. This is because our client casework data has indicated that couples not living with their children have very different needs when it comes to English language usage and support than families with children.

In the first year we gather very detailed case study material about the different members of the family, their socio-economic and educational backgrounds as well as their perceptions, needs, and experiences relating to using English as they go about their everyday lives.

At approximately the same time of every year we return to these six families to gather new material on their perceptions, needs, and experiences relating to developing and using English language skills in their lives.

These findings will clearly demonstrate a series of changes over time within particular refugee families, as well as different patterns of change over time when comparing across them.

Longitudinal case study work can take a number of forms.

We can choose to take a cross-section of clients from different age groups in order to look at the ways in which different age groups understand, for example, integration and settlement. Or we can take a random selection of, for example, five 17-year-olds, to look at vocational choices. We can then select another five 17-year-olds sometime later – let's say at regular intervals of time over a period of five years.

But the time periods dividing the different stages of data gathering needn't be so long.

For example, in order to study how bail hearings are affected by an upcoming change in legislation, we can use a before versus after case study, gathering case study material from a particular court now, and again six months after the new legislation has been introduced.

We might even gather case studies at different times in the day in order to measure if and how perceptions of physical safety and risk amongst rape survivors living as refugees in London fluctuate according to the time of day.

As mentioned above, we can also use case studies to look at the impact of a particular project or service. For this purpose we need to select a particular case or set of cases and gather case study information about them using the same questions or themes and the same methods, at two or three intervals: before, during (optional), and after the project or service provision. Gathering case study material during the project or while the services are still being provided allows us to include information about the particular way in which a project or service was implemented or practiced. Comparing across these two or three case study 'data sets' allows us to look at what changes have been brought about, if any, by the intervention.

When monitoring change over time, it makes sense to use either typical or representative cases whenever these are available. When time and resources allow, incorporating deviant cases is not only ethically sound, but also broadens our understanding of change over time. We also need to understand how to compare across case studies in order to get the best out of projects which seek to monitor for change over time (see "Selecting cases for comparison" page 36).

Using case studies for lobbying

When we need to bring a particular situation to the attention of the public, policy makers, or the press, case studies can be invaluable. They bring to life a problem that can otherwise seem abstract and distant. It is case studies that remind us of the very human consequence of particular policies, practices, and prejudices.

This is where extreme cases can be useful. These are cases that are deviant or uncommon, rather than representative or typical, and which have the power to shock. This shock value can be very useful when challenging assumptions held by the public, the press, or policy makers.

But there is an ethical and methodological responsibility when using extreme cases. If we always provide cases that, for example, depict asylum seekers as either powerless embodiments of pity – infant in one arm, modest bag of belongings on the other, struggling to survive – or as exceptional individuals who have retained their authority and dignity against all odds, then we are doing a great disservice to the majority who fall between

these two poles. By perpetuating what we have come to call the victim–hero dichotomy, we are contributing to a situation in which the majority will qualify neither for our compassion nor for asylum support or sanctuary.

Whenever we use an extreme case in a campaign, lobbying document or event, we need also to mention, though not necessarily in the same detail, how more typical or representative cases are responding to the same situation.

We should also, as far as practically possible when carrying out lobbying work, develop an understanding of extreme cases that make the opposite point from the one we want our case to make. This functions as our insurance policy. It will help us to avoid the obvious embarrassment and strategic blunder of being countered by another organisation or agency with a case that illustrates a scenario opposite to the one we have chosen to present. Statistics, describing the entire population of cases with which your organisation has worked, can also prove very useful. If we know the commonalities and differences across all the cases we have encountered, we can locate the extreme cases relative to the others, thereby increasing their credibility.

using case studies for fundraising

Today we are competing with more and more agencies for money. It has become imperative to build up the strongest possible justification for a proposed project (in the case of fundraising) and the strongest possible defence for the continuation of an existing one (in the case of reporting to funders). Case studies can serve either function well. But these two functions, while having many commonalities, present different challenges.

in funding proposals:

Extreme case studies can be very effective in communicating an urgent need for a given project or service, in that they demonstrate an extreme need for the particular service or intervention that the proposed project would introduce. But, just as before, we have a responsibility to outline as accurately as possible how this extreme case fits into a wider population of cases.

But other cases can also be powerful here. When we are fundraising for a particular intervention, cases that illustrate the positive effect of a similar or identical intervention introduced in a different, perhaps more informal environment can be very effective. This kind of case functions as a success story and can help convince the funder that providing funding for this particular project would not constitute a leap of faith into the unknown, but rather an investment in a project that is grounded in evidence and therefore more likely to succeed in the real world. If granted the funding, such case study work will also help in the design and implementation of the project.

Let's imagine that we are a housing service provider and we want to change our existing services to suit the growing population of unaccompanied refugee children requiring accommodation. We want to fundraise to establish a mentoring system. We have reason to believe – based on our knowledge of a particular group of refugee children, that when older children from this particular group are rewarded for befriending and providing support and encouragement to younger children sharing a language and similarities in demographic background, aspects of physical and/or mental health of these younger children improves.

We want to invest in some computers and computer games, and believe that we can encourage this mentoring by tying access to the computer games to time spent by older children teaching younger children to play them. The more time spent in game-training – which would necessitate in most cases training in very basic computer literacy – the more free time the mentor would earn in the computer lab. Given time these younger children could similarly earn free time in the lab, thereby encouraging a trickle-down effect.

We present the experiences of the group of refugee children with whom we are in contact as a case study. We suggest that by simply using computer games and access to the computer lab as an incentive, mentoring could be encouraged.

when reporting to funders:

Case studies can also be used when reporting to funders during a project. Here our principal objective is to convince the funder that the project is having a positive impact. Projects rarely go according to plan. Adjustments need to be made along the way to meet the needs of a changing clientele in changing circumstances.

Funders need to be reassured that at least some of the original objectives are being met, and that any unanticipated changes being experienced are not impeding the ability to meet them. Here cases that attest to the effective impact of the project, as well as ones that attest to the opposite, can be used. The 'negative' cases can be presented as a source of insight into adjustments that either will or have been made, thus covering all bases.

But funders are also interested in the typical cases. So it is a good idea to include a 'success story' case study, a 'disappointed' case study, and a typical case study. These three, combined with an outline of where they can be located in relation to a wider population of relevant cases, should make even the most demanding funder happy!

When can we use case studies?

Summary: Case studies can be used to evaluate what we do, and to explore, explain, and monitor change, to lobby, and to keep funders happy.

When evaluating what we do, typical and representative cases are most commonly used, but deviant cases can help us check whether our service or project is also effectively responding to extreme or rare needs.

When exploring and explaining it is always a good idea to include typical or representative cases as well as deviant ones.

When monitoring change over time, we can select a particular case/s and follow that case/s over time. We can interview the case about change over time, or we can select a cross-section of cases which at a given intersection of time are at different stages in a process. All organisations should study change over time amongst their clientele, in their own service provision, and in the wider socio-political environment.

When lobbying and fundraising, while extreme cases are powerful, these should always be presented in relation to the wider population of cases. Otherwise the more common cases begin to be understood as less 'worthy'.

When reporting to funders, it is a good idea to use typical cases, cases that are success stories, and 'disappointing' ones – cases which haven't benefited as we had hoped. This will help us demonstrate that we are prioritising meeting all our clients' needs as they emerge in the course of our project.

9 What different people want from a case study

A funder and an advocacy worker will want different things from a case study. The section that follows outlines the basic expectations that different people have of a case study. When we are setting out to do case study work, these expectations need to guide the case studies we produce. These lists of bulleted points can function as checklists we can apply when putting case studies together in order to ensure that the distinctive requirements of different audiences are being met.

the caseworker

A caseworker is interested in what they can learn about good practice from a case study. Case studies can therefore be used in caseworker training. But these case studies need to emphasise:

- what to look for when dealing with individual cases
- how the caseworker should optimally respond to the client's needs in a case like this
- how this case is similar to and different from other cases
- how a new type of case may demand a new casework approach, when and if this becomes relevant.

the casework manager

A casework manager uses case studies to assess the way that casework is currently being done. Case studies help casework managers to look at the relationship between clients' needs and casework service provision. The casework manager often needs to review a number of case studies in order to assess the way that caseworkers and resources are being applied to different situations. It is advisable that casework managers use two approaches to keep abreast of casework developments:

- They select a small number of cases which they can follow over time (see "using case studies to monitor change" page 20).
- They establish a practice of regularly surveying casework using a range of case studies.

These case studies need to emphasise:

- a range of cases in terms of client needs
- cases handled by different caseworkers
- cases handled at different times (in the day/week/month/year)
- cases handled in a range of conditions marked by different resource constraints (time, training, staffing, caseload...)

the advocacy/campaigns/media officer

The advocacy officer is frequently interested in case studies that can communicate an important message to a wide and heterogeneous audience. S/he should therefore use case studies that are accessible and likely to grab the attention of the public, journalists, and policy makers. This is challenging in that these three audiences have very different expectations of case studies.

Generally case studies for lobbying need to:

- be brief and to-the-point
- use accessible language without being patronising
- spell things out clearly without assuming prior knowledge
- include a local flavour using contextual information which is not too detailed
- include personal details, as these can inspire empathy
- appeal to the audience's sense of justice or compassion
- include an assessment of how a particular case study highlights a need for a change, whether of policy, practice, or perception
- include a case summary and recommendations which together stand alone (i.e. make sense outside of the rest of the case study).

In most cases, the person in your organisation responsible for advocacy or campaigning will be preparing case studies for a number of different audiences (e.g. policy makers, journalists, a parliamentary committee), and will need to consider the distinctive expectations or interests these audiences often have.

the fundraising officer/the funder

The fundraising officer needs case studies which will convince funders of the urgent need for a proposed project.

These cases need to illustrate:

- how current systems are neglecting particular cases and client needs
- how different characteristics of the case study necessitate different dimensions of the proposed project
- how the situation could further deteriorate in the absence of the proposed intervention/project
- how prevalent this kind of case is, thereby suggesting that many cases would benefit from the proposed project.

the client

Clients are involved in case study work in two different ways. Firstly, you have the client whom the case study is about. S/he is entitled to have certain expectations both about how the case study work is conducted and about how the case study itself is presented. We will call this client the client-participant.

Secondly, you have the client who can benefit from the case studies developed on the basis of other clients' experiences. We will call this client the client-recipient.

For the client-participant, the case study needs to:

- select and present information about the case that reflects the client's circumstances and experiences as accurately as possible. The author of the case study has to state clearly

which information was derived directly from the client, and which information came from elsewhere

- acknowledge the contribution of this particular case, such as to a deeper understanding, to refined services, or to alerting an audience to a particular situation
- anonymise or remove any personal identifiers (names, titles, addresses etc) in keeping with the Data Protection Act 1998
- respect the relevance not only of the characteristics of the case and the services provided in that case, but also of the client's own suggestions and responses
- treat case studies as extensions of clients' lives, rather than as mere numbers and sets of circumstances.

For the client-recipient, the case study needs to:

- be relevant to her/his own casework needs and situation
- offer insights which will assist her/him to better understand their own situation relative to that of others
- assist in deepening her/his understanding of casework service provision procedures and realities
- illustrate that services have a flexibility which enables them to meet diverse needs, if and when this can be asserted. This can have a reassuring effect on the client-recipient.

a suggestion

It sometimes helps to talk to someone from the intended audience prior to beginning a case study in order to discuss the expectations, concerns, and pressures currently affecting their work and therefore likely to affect their responses to case studies. You should also try out the case study you have written on one or more individuals from your target audience, and use their feedback to modify it before the final presentation or publication.

What different people want from a case study

Summary: Whoever the audience, the following should always be considered before selecting the case and writing the case study:

the language used – neither patronising nor too full of jargon

prior knowledge – work with what the most ill-informed members of the audience know, without assuming too much

length – as short as possible without compromising on details appropriate to the particular audience's interests

concerns and pressures – keep the audience's function or role with its inherent objectives and pressures constantly in mind

selection of case/s – will an extreme case, a typical/representative case, or a combination of cases best engage the intended audience in the desired way?

10 Different types of cases and how to select them

Our central objective in producing case studies will guide both the type of case we use and the way we select it. The types of cases relevant to work in the refugee sector can be organised into six types:

- a representative case
- a typical case
- a deviant case
- an extreme case
- a randomly selected case
- an accessible case

What distinguishes one from the other is the approach used to select the case. However this break down of case types does not preclude the possibility that a particular case will be, for example, both accessible and deviant. This categorisation aims simply to clarify the defining characteristics of each type of case, what is needed before selecting the case, and the way in which each type of case is ultimately selected. Provided that all the prerequisites listed under 'What do we need?' for a particular type of case are satisfied, we can use that type of case. But certain types of cases do lend themselves to certain uses. These are described within the sections entitled 'When are we likely to use it?' below.

a representative case

- What is it? A case is representative if it shares a series of characteristics common across a group or population of cases.
- What do we need? In order to select a representative case, we need to know at least basic demographic information about all the cases that exist. If we don't even know how many cases there are in total, we cannot select a case and refer to it as representative.
- How do we select it? We often need to review all the relevant cases we have on file in order to find out what the common or shared characteristics are. But we may also be able to use existing statistics or findings which also offer us this information. We then need to identify a representative case which has all these common characteristics. Should there be a number of such cases it would make sense to randomly select one.
- When are we likely to use it? To report to funders, to evaluate what we do, and to monitor change.
- What should we be careful of? Remember to detail clearly what it is about this case that is representative. No case can be entirely representative – there will always be case-specific characteristics that should also be clearly indicated.

For example, we are interested in the causes of suicide amongst asylum seekers in detention. We are aware of a nationwide survey of the nature and prevalence of suicide and self-harm amongst asylum seekers in detention. This study found that on average, suicide cases were unmarried male detainees, average age 25 years, without dependants or known contacts either in or outside of the detention centre, and who were unable to communicate in English.

We could collect together just those cases that share these characteristics and randomly select one or more of these cases as case studies.

a typical case

- What is it? This is very similar to a representative case in that a typical case reflects the shared characteristics observed across a set of cases.
- What do we need? Unlike representative cases, with typical cases we don't need a survey of or basic information about all the cases. We just need to know approximately what the shared characteristics are across all the cases with which we are familiar. These characteristics need to be clearly described, and will be used as a justification for selecting a particular case/s. Often a short informal group discussion with caseworkers who are very familiar with the cases on file will get you the information you need in order to select an appropriately typical case.
- How do we select it? As with a representative case, the most commonly observed characteristics guide case selection. We then need to identify a case which has all these common characteristics. Should there be a number of such cases it would make sense to randomly select one.
- When are we likely to use it? To evaluate what we do, explain something, monitor change, report to funders, fundraise, and lobby.
- What should we be careful of? We need to avoid the temptation to make generalisations about all the cases on the basis of a typical case. This is dangerous because the commonalities and differences across the population of cases are unknown and therefore ungrounded generalisations run the risk of presenting uncommon characteristics or responses as common or prevalent. Once again, remember to detail clearly what it is about this case that is typical. No case can be entirely typical – there will always be case-specific characteristics which should also be clearly indicated.

For example, a typical case would be useful if as a regional refugee consortium we wanted to explore the way in which refugee community organisations were responding to 'religious conflict' between refugee teenagers from a particular country of origin.

Only a small budget can be dedicated to the project. Previous research has indicated that the conflict manifests in the form of 'pavement violence' between gangs of predominantly teenaged boys in relatively poor boroughs in urban centres. The research also found that these gang clashes tended to happen on weekend nights.

But no comprehensive list of cases of this particular form of gang violence exists due to some cases going unreported. Hence the need for us to make use of typical rather than representative cases.

So, on the basis of this research we select a particular case of gang violence involving refugees from our selected country of origin listed in police records. This fight took place between two gangs dominated by teenaged boys from different religious groups in Slough on a Saturday night earlier in the year.

You will notice that the selected case shares all the characteristics described as predominant in the previous research findings we have read. A typical case is used in a situation in which we do not know enough about all the cases but we know about a limited number of trends across an incomplete sample of cases. We often have to work with only partial knowledge of some cases rather than partial knowledge of all the cases. This is especially the case when we are studying incriminating activities, or activities or attitudes regarded as 'taboo', as well as when we are working with invisible populations.

a deviant case

While a deviant case should not be equated with an extreme case, they are selected for case study work in much the same way. But first, let's clarify the difference between the two.

- What is it? This is an uncommon case – one whose characteristics make it different from typical or representative cases. These are cases that fall outside any observed trends, but are nonetheless invaluable in ensuring that, for example, a particular service responds to the needs of all potential clients and not only those clients sharing certain common needs.
- What do we need? We need to know the common trends observed across the population of cases.
- How do we select it? Such cases must occur infrequently in the population of cases, and share none of the characteristics observed as common. The quantifiable characteristics of the case should be far from any reported average. In other words, find an unusual case.

- When are we likely to use it? To evaluate what we do, explore something new, explain something, report to funders, fundraise, and lobby.
- What should we be careful of? It is important when using a deviant case to indicate the ways in which it deviates from the norm and to justify using it nonetheless by referring to its relevance to, for example, the evaluation of a programme, the revision of a policy, changing client needs, etc.

For example, let's imagine that we are interested in the needs of second generation refugee children tasked with translating for parents and/or grandparents in all dealings with statutory and non-statutory agencies in the UK. A case of a deaf eight year old capable of lip-reading would constitute a deviant case in that according to RCO reports, these cases predominantly involve teenaged children with no disabilities.

an extreme case

- What is it? It all depends on our emphasis. If we want to study mental health needs, a case which has reported several suicide attempts would qualify as an extreme case.
- What do we need? Calling a case extreme implies that we know that it lies near one of the poles of a spectrum measuring a particular quantity or quality such as severity of need for a service.
- How do we select it? Be clear about what you are examining and whether this can be described in the form of a spectrum or scale. Extreme cases are most frequently selected either on the basis of social sympathies or a perceived injustice, or for their inherent capacity to inspire, shock, or disgust. The objective of our work determines from which extreme on the scale the case will be selected.
- When are we likely to use it? To evaluate what we do, fundraise, and lobby.
- What should we be careful of? It is important once again, when using an extreme case, to indicate what makes it extreme, and to justify using it nonetheless by referring to its relevance to, for example, the evaluation of a programme, the revision of a policy, encouraging public awareness, etc.

For example, a particular newspaper wants to do a supplement on experiences of race hate amongst refugees and asylum seekers in London. A case in which an elderly Muslim refugee woman was tied to a streetlamp on Edgware Road and gagged using rashers of bacon would constitute an extreme case. The case was extreme in that, according to Metropolitan Police records, the range of cases stretches from physical violence and humiliation on one side of the spectrum to bigoted 'jokes' on the other.

a randomly selected case

- What is it? A case which has been selected randomly and not because of any particular characteristic. In other words, all the cases within the population stood an equal chance of being selected for study.
- What do we need? A comprehensive list of all the cases in the population.
- How do we select it? Randomly, either manually or using a database or spreadsheet with a random selection function.
- When are we likely to use it? To evaluate what we do, explore something new, or monitor change.
- What should we be careful of? Randomly selected cases can also be representative cases in that a case is randomly selected from a subset of cases all sharing characteristics reported as common. But when we use a random case selected from all the cases and not a particular subset of cases, it can only be used as the basis for exploratory work and will need to be followed by a larger scale research project which can test the exploratory findings across a broader range and number of cases. It is always better practice (whenever possible) to randomly select multiple cases in an exploratory study.

For example, we are interested in the jobhunting experiences of refugee men between 18 and 40 years of age who are registered members of a large RCO in Birmingham. This is part of a long-term study of refugee integration.

We approach the RCO and request an anonymised list of men between 18 and 40, not identifiable except for an anonymous registration number. There are 30 cases on the list. We mix up the ordering of the registration numbers and pick every sixth number on the list. The RCO then contacts the five randomly selected men to ask whether they will participate in the study.

We end up following three of them as they go about looking for a job over a two month period. When synthesised into three narrative accounts which are subsequently discussed, these form our three case studies. They help us to highlight certain obstacles to employment which need to be further examined in a nationwide refugee integration study to be conducted the following year.

an accessible case

- What is it? This is simply a case which is already known and which is, for one reason or another, a convenient case to use.
- What do we need? Convenient access to a case relevant to the subject in which we are interested.

- How do we select it? We select the case/s to which we have easy access. Easy access can be in the form of prior consent from a client or a case for which appropriate information has already been gathered or can be gathered without using too many resources.
- When are we likely to use it? To explore something new or monitor change.
- What should we be careful of? Accessible cases are only appropriate for exploratory case study work, or for contexts characterised by severe resource or time constraints. But we need to be very clear with our audience that the case practically 'selected itself' by virtue of whatever characteristics made access easy.

For example, let's say that our casework manager is interested in client feedback about a service we have just introduced. She suggests that we conduct short interviews about the new service with clients who have given mobile numbers amongst their contact details and who speak English.

Rules of thumb:

- we must always justify our selection of a particular case/s
- if we base the selection of our case/s on prior research, the selection is easier to justify

Different types of cases and how to select them

Summary: Your objective as well as the information and prior research you have at your fingertips will largely dictate which type of case you select. In short, both representative and deviant cases demand that you know the central trends across all the cases in the population. A typical case requires that you have some idea of what is happening in most of the cases. A randomly selected case simply requires that you have a comprehensive listing of all the cases in the population, each standing an equal chance of being selected. The least demanding on prior knowledge and resources is the accessible case which is simply convenient to use.

II How many case studies should we do?

This all depends on context. When deciding how many case studies should be done, consider the time and resource constraints faced by:

- the author or organisation generating the case study
- the funder
- the client/s on whom the case study is based
- the intended audience

And be realistic!

The function of the case study should as far as possible help to determine the number of case studies undertaken. The following is a brief list of the different contexts in which using multiple cases are useful:

- showing changes over time
- showing differences within the client group in terms of demographics, needs, responses, outcomes
- showing international, regional, or local comparisons
- showing different choices available to either service provider or client
- showing different implementations of the same policy/service
- showing different consequences of the same policy/service

Using a single case study is justifiable:

- when doing exploratory work
- when investigating only one client's situation
- when evaluating the practical impact of a particular policy or practice on the individual
- when illustrating a point backed up by other evidence and/or cases
- with extreme cases: when needing to shock or communicate urgent need
- with deviant cases: when wanting to demonstrate deviation from a norm
- with very consistent findings: when one case is literally 'representative'
- when a typical case is appropriate (e.g. presentations to media, government, the public)
- when relating this case to other cases or locating it in a population of cases

But remember to give a thorough justification!

How many case studies should we do?

Summary: Using multiple cases is always preferable if the resources and the intended audiences' time and interest can accommodate them. Multiple case studies highlight commonalities and differences and help to overcome the temptation of inferring too many case-specific characteristics to the population at large. However when the resources or the interests or time of our intended audience demand a single case study, we need to provide a justification for selecting that case, and we need to locate that case amongst a broader population of cases.

12 Selecting cases for comparison

It is always a good idea to use cases that are different in some way when doing a multiple case study project. But it is very important not to integrate too many differences, as this can complicate things terribly! Be assured that a lot of unanticipated differences will emerge from the case studies themselves.

The trick here is to select case studies which seem from the outset to be very similar except for the characteristic/s in which you are interested, like the 'control' and 'experiment' flasks you worked with in chemistry lessons at school.

For example, let's say that we work for a non-governmental organisation concerned with the mental health of refugee and asylum seeking children. Our casework files have shown that there are several cases in which social workers have noted a positive mental health change in unaccompanied children with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), who are living with and caring for domestic animals. So we want to investigate further.

We want to examine whether different kinds of domestic animals have the same or different effects on the children. And we have been given enough funding for a half-year study. We gather case study material from four girls and four boys of the same age, ethnic, and cultural background. For the first month we simply gather data twice a week from each child, their friends, and relatives about different experiences and contexts involving traumatic stress.

After a month, we give a pet to each child – either a cat, a dog, a parrot, or a goldfish – together with enough food and toys to entertain and sustain the pet. We continue to gather data twice a week from the children, their friends and relatives about symptoms of traumatic stress.

At the end of each month we rotate the pets, giving each child, over the duration of four months, a chance to care for and live with each one of the four domestic animals.

This case study design will allow us to gather rich narrative case study material. At the end of the study we will have case study material which will inform us about the impact of caring for a pet on managing PTSD amongst children, as well as the impact of gender and species of pet.

Rule of thumb: when studying a particular issue, we should ideally select the cases to allow for the following comparisons:

- across regular time intervals
- across relevant demographic differences (gender, age, country of origin, ethnicity, religion, vocation, education, area and type of residence etc)



We should always remain alert and open to finding unanticipated trends across the cases which allow for unexpected groupings of commonality and difference.

Selecting cases for comparison

Summary: Multiple case studies should incorporate comparisons between the cases.

Try to limit the number of differences included in a multiple case study project, as it is inevitable that there will be more differences than originally recognised. Amongst your other more content-specific comparisons, try always to include comparisons over time and over demographic groupings.

13 What questions should we ask to collect case study information?

We should remember that we don't always have to generate case study material from scratch i.e. we don't always have to do special interviews with the sole purpose of building up a case study. Often the casework data we have on file is full of information that can be used for case studies and which does not necessitate any further interviewing.

For example, some organisations already use casework databases that allow caseworkers to add case study details in a memo or comment function while working through the more structured questions and value options. A member of staff can then type in a search term which automatically picks out only those cases which meet the search criteria. The case comments and details which are retrieved can then easily be copied and pasted into case studies.

Rigorous case study work demands that, as far as possible, we should assemble data and information using a combination of different sources and methods so that the answers to any of the questions we ask come from more than one source and/or in more than one format. This practice is called triangulation. We can then compare across the data to check and confirm the validity of a particular piece of information. This serves as an insurance policy against those who may try to dispute findings after the project has been completed.

For example, let's imagine that we are studying refugees and employment in the UK. We would be wise to gather data and information from a wide range of organisations and individuals, including refugees, statutory and non-statutory agencies that provide assistance to help refugees find jobs as well as agencies supporting refugees once they are employed, trade unions, employers, and the colleagues of employed refugees.

It would also greatly strengthen our study if we gathered a range of different types of information and data using different methods. We could gather statistics using a survey administered to agencies, qualitative data from refugees using an interview schedule, and case study data from a selection of employers and colleagues of refugees.

We would then compare across these different sources and types of data and information to get the most thorough and reliable understanding of the 'bigger picture'. The inconsistencies between different sources and types can teach us a lot about different perspectives, interests, and underlying challenges and tensions affecting this issue.

In all case studies we need to gather certain basic contextual information about the client. The amount of detail gathered in each of these areas depends very much on the particular issue we are wanting to study or about which we want to campaign.

But most frequently, when gathering case study information, we need to broadly answer the following questions:

a) about the project/service

Most of the time our work focuses on providing a particular service or implementing a particular project. In these contexts we are interested in studying just how effective our work has been in meeting our initial objectives, and any unintended effects. This principle would also apply to advocacy work which frequently focuses on the particular consequences of a given policy or state-sponsored initiative.

When evaluating our own service or project, we can get this information from the project proposal which should have included the objectives as well as the means of measuring if and when these objectives were met. If there isn't project documentation which goes into such detail, you may have to consult the project leader who may either know where to find this information or may be able to provide this information her/himself. Evidence about implementation and change over time may be available in casework data, but may also have been discussed and minuted in casework meetings, for example. We can get this kind of information about the objectives of a state intervention or policy and how impact is specified by referring to government policy and practice documentation. This is often available online from relevant government websites, which may also provide contacts and email addresses to which you can submit such queries.

We need to start by asking the following questions about the intervention, project, policy, or service:

project or service profile

- What needs or pressures inspired the project, policy, or service?
- What were the original objectives?
- What evidence do we have about how the project, policy, or service was implemented?
- What evidence do we have about whether implementation took place consistently over time, and across all service providers, areas, client groups?
- How would we recognise in an individual case if the intended objectives have been met?

b) about the client

Then, having gathered all relevant information about what was meant to happen together with information about what did happen, we need to select our cases and gather data on each case. Most of the time, our cases will be individuals. But data will sometimes be gathered on groups of people such as families. It is important in such instances that information about differences within the group is gathered as well as information on those areas where there is consensus. We should always remain sceptical of a situation in which a single perspective dominates. This is frequently a reflection of the politics of the group rather than its homogeneity or capacity for consensus.

When gathering information from clients the following groups of questions, organised under a series of profiles, are likely to be useful:

demographic profile

- age or date of birth?
- country of origin?
- gender?
- ethnic or racial background?
- educational attainment?
- profession?
- mother tongue?
- proficiency in English?
- employed/unemployed/self-employed/student?
- health (including mental health if and when relevant and ethical)?
- housing and area of residence (relevant especially for service provision)?
- household income?
- children, if any (and their ages, and whether they are in the UK, dependant etc)?
- elderly parents (if they are dependant or living with client)?
- other dependants?

service-user profile

- How would the client describe their needs in the area/s of interest?
- What public sector services does the client currently receive, in the area/s of interest (together with experience of these services)?
- What non-governmental services does the client currently receive, in the area/s of interest (together with experience of these services)?
- What services or support has the client received from your organisation, if relevant (together with experience of these services)?

The following areas of questioning will not always be relevant to the particular issues you are looking at, but they are worth reading through just in case. They can be particularly useful when doing strategic planning, fundraising, and lobbying.

extramural lifestyle profile

- choice of leisure activities (including travel, art, and music, reading preferences etc)?
- consumer choices?
- cultural events celebrated?
- social networks and socialising?

concern profile

- What concerns or fears does the client currently have?

aspiration profile

- In an ideal world with no constraints on time, resources, or choice what job, education, leisure, housing, health, and social situation would the client ideally like to be in?

All the above areas of questioning could be applied to the present or the past. The latter could include information about the case's experiences in their country of origin. These profiles can also be built up in reference to expectations of future geographic, socio-economic, and cultural situations. This should not be confused with the aspiration profile which is based not on what the client expects to happen in the future, but rather on what the client wishes to happen in the future.

There are ways of eliciting all the above information using, for example, life story interviews. However these are labour-intensive to gather, transcribe, and analyse. Nonetheless they can be a wonderful source of richly contextualised and very human stories about how different conditions and policies have affected not just particular areas, but entire lives (whether positively or negatively).

But it is of course preferable to build the above profiles into casework database systems. This can be done without being too draining on either the client or the caseworker's valuable time and energy. However remember that while shortcuts for gathering data such as multiple choice options are very practical, they should be preceded by more open-ended questions that elicit the client's spontaneous needs, responses, and feedback. This sequencing is important as gathering the structured data first effectively coaches the client into thinking along predetermined lines rather than more personally and creatively.

For example, some organisations have come up with innovative ways of capturing this information in a contextualised narrative form. One casework database has two screens simultaneously visible. The first screen is simply a memo screen referring to a particular case, and the screen below it is formatted as a structured casework form. This means that as the caseworker and client are working through a particular need or experience, the caseworker can be making notes on the experience, and any contextual information which will not be covered by the questions and value options on the structured casework form.

What questions should we ask when gathering information for a case study?

Summary: The questions we ask in order to create a detailed picture of a particular case and its circumstances depend very much on the main objective of the study. Most often we study the impact or consequences of a particular project or service. So our first step is to answer specific questions about the objectives and implementation of the project/service. Then we turn to our clients in order to study just what impact or consequences the project/service has had in practice. We do this using a set of questions grouped together as a service user profile.

But we also need to gather data about the similarities and differences in client response to the project/service. This we do by gathering data on each client case using the demographic profile, extramural profile, concern, and aspiration profiles.

Even when we gather data for purposes other than to evaluate impact, these profiles can help to systematise data gathering and thereby maintain consistency, especially when working with multiple cases.

14 Combining case studies with other forms of data

Case study data is simply data or information that has been systematically gathered about a single case or a series of cases. In other words, this data can take the form of notes taken during a casework telephone interview or other relevant interview material, the responses of a client to a survey, the description by a caseworker of the circumstances surrounding a particular case, casework statistics, or a combination of any or all of the above. In this sector as well as in other sectors, case studies have become synonymous with stories about the circumstances and experiences of a particular client. So we have come to assume that case study data is qualitative data. But this needn't be so.

We can build up a case study from a quantitative data set, such as a casework database entirely made up of closed questions and multiple choice value options. However most of the time when we refer to case study data, we are referring to a narrative – a qualitative, text-based description of a client's circumstances in the context of, for example, housing, bail applications, health, employment, or education.

There is a host of other forms of data that can complement traditional case study material based on interviews or casework data. Examples include maps, excerpts from radio, film, television, newspapers and advertisements, photographs, sound archives such as songs, and family trees. We can also use photographs taken by clients given disposable cameras, as well as audio-diaries and video-footage of cultural events. The more innovative we are, the more likely a case study is to have an effect.

It is also always advisable to gather case study material about a given case from a variety of different sources. The commonalities that we then find between the sources constitute evidence which is well-grounded and tested. But the differences between different sources of evidence can be even more insightful. These can point to significant taboos, tensions, or conflicting interests which need to be taken seriously, particularly in the context of service provision or policy implementation. This is the practice of triangulation also discussed in “What questions should we ask to collect case study information?” (see page 38).

Combining case studies with other forms of data is most effective when you want to make a point supported by different kinds of evidence. Case study projects are seldom large in scale, and it often helps to support them with some statistical or qualitative evidence which refers to the same findings across a much larger population of cases, a longer time period, or a larger geographical area than you could accommodate in your case study project. (see “Case studies can't give us...” page 15).

For example, let's imagine that we are wanting to present a case study about the choice made by many refugees to resettle in Sheffield after being dispersed elsewhere. If we combine the case study with the number of refugees who have registered with RCOs in Sheffield after relocating from their dispersal address, this gives our particular case study greater credibility and impact. Suddenly we are not just talking about one case, but about x number of cases. We could also integrate some statistics on how these numbers might increase in the future if current conditions remain the same.

Statistical data can also be used upfront to guide the way that we select the case we study.

For example, if we are wanting to look at unemployment amongst refugees between 30 and 60 years of age, we can look at some of the survey work that has already been done on refugees and work placement. In an annual report we find the following figures:

- 69 per cent of 568 cases on file at the agency in question have been unemployed for at least one year
- within that percentage there are far more men (74 per cent) than women (26 per cent)
- and within that 69 per cent, the average age of an unemployed man is 38, while the average age of an unemployed woman is 49.

On the basis of these statistics we decide to select eight cases, comprising an equal number of men and women. Among each same-gender group there are two cases between 30 and 45 years of age, and two cases between 45 and 60 years of age. This particular selection of cases allows us to benefit from the survey findings that already exist, while taking them one step further by looking at more detailed case study material which will tell us about the circumstances which help to explain these differences in gender and age.

Combining case studies with other forms of data

Summary: Case studies gain credibility when used alongside other forms of data. This is because more is better when it comes to including different kinds and sources of evidence. Statistical data is the most obvious choice here as it helps not only with the selection of cases, but also in widening the scope and significance of a project including case study work.

15 What should we do with case study information once gathered?

What we do with case study information all depends on what form it takes and what purpose we have gathered it for. Like all information, case study information needs to be analysed, summarised, and presented.

But as mentioned above, a case study is the story behind a particular case. Another way of interpreting this is that a case study is the story about the relationship between a service provider and his or her client. In the case of lobbying, a case study becomes the story of the relationship between a particular system or set of circumstances and a client or client family.

Regardless of which of the above stories your case study tells, the process of extracting the story from the data and information you gather remains the same. The following approach may help to guide you through the process of analysing case study data and information.

First, here are some rules of thumb to help you analyse case study material:

- 1 Gather together all the information and data about your selected case. You should never have to rely exclusively on data or information from a single source, such as the client or caseworker. All data sources are complementary and increase the confidence and depth of your findings.
- 2 From the data and information at your disposal, define your client and her/his/their position (background, needs, expectations etc – use data gathered using the profiles described above).
- 3 Define the service provider (and the position of the service provider in terms of organisational objectives, capacity, needs, and constraints) or system with which the client has had contact.
- 4 Extract all the significant developments in the relationship or experience. This is the ‘what happened?’ dimension of the process. This information should be organised either chronologically or thematically.
- 5 Extract all the contextual information relating to these developments. This is the cladding – the where, when, how, and why? – which provides the background to what happened. This contextual information can either be integrated into and organised around the significant developments outlined in point four, or it can be provided as an introduction to the case study.
- 6 Extract all the responses, feedback, and suggestions offered by different parties (the client/s and service providers, amongst others). This will form the basis of the recommendations section.
- 7 Review all the data and information that has been extracted for steps two – six, and distil all of it into one central point which the case study is making. This is a coding exercise during which you highlight or code different issues which emerge out of the evidence collected. Ultimately these issues or themes can be connected into a bigger picture, or compete with one another for dominance. The bigger picture or dominant theme becomes the central point made by the case study. This bigger picture need not be complicated. Often it is just two or perhaps three themes which the case study

demonstrates are connected in a particular way, such as underemployment (theme one) and depression (theme two).

- 8 Having reviewed the data and information extracted, and noted the central point made, make a summary of the case study. This will later become the executive summary and should include the main parties in the story, what happened, the central point, and recommendations.

analysing evidence to campaign about an existing policy

When analysing case study material for advocacy purposes, often the campaign we are wanting to run is responding to an existing policy. In this situation, we need to start by investigating if the lifestyle, needs, and responses of the client (the asylum seeker or refugee) assumed in the policy (the hypothetical client) are consistent with the clients with whom your organisation works (the typical client).

In such a situation, the most important evidence you can use is that of a difference between the *hypothetical client* and the *typical client* with whom your organisation is in contact. This points to the possibility that the existing policy is based not on the current realities facing an average or typical client, but on an incorrect series of assumptions.

It may also help the campaign to assemble data on how often one might encounter a case with the characteristics of the hypothetical client, as compared with how often one encounters a case with the characteristics of a typical case such as that selected.

To investigate whether such a difference exists, the following approach may be useful:

- 1 Gather together all policy documents and practice guidelines together with any other training materials which may have been given to service providers.
- 2 Gather together any interview material which may have been gathered from policy makers or public service providers themselves about the policy and/or practices.
- 3 Review the documents and interview material and extract information to answer the following questions:
 - a How is the client/asylum seeker/refugee/user defined?
 - b What constitutes the need or problem that the policy/practice aims to rectify or change?
 - c What does this need or problem assume about the situation in which the client finds her/himself, and the way in which they respond to this situation?
 - d How does the policy propose to change this situation?
 - e On what evidence has the policy/practice been based?
- 4 Gather together all evidence about your typical case/s.
- 5 Extract empirical information about the situation in which the typical client finds her/himself, and the way in which they responded to this situation.
- 6 The difference between the policy's hypothetical client and your actual client's case then constitutes the case study's central point.

16 Presenting case studies

If we are just working with casework data, and especially if we are wanting to do more than one case study, we need to organise each case study in the same way. The common way of doing this is to describe the setting (the context and background) and the characters (the client and the service provider or system) up front, and then to go into the 'what happened'.

A case study should include the following elements:

- executive summary (who is involved – the clients and the service providers/system, what happened, what is recommended)
- the main focus of the case study – a particular need, service, new circumstance etc
- an outline of how you came to learn about this issue or circumstance i.e. your methods (including why you selected the particular cases you did)
- the case study/ies themselves, each including:
 - i how this case relates to other cases
 - ii who is the client or case?
 - iii what are their circumstances?
 - iv what happened: what are their experiences with a particular service provision, system, or environment?
- what new insights the case study offers about a particular need or set of circumstances
- what recommendations can be made on the basis of this case study/set of case studies, including any further research which needs to be done.

When comparing your typical client's case against the hypothetical client, and after presenting each 'case', you should:

- summarise the differences between the two
- discuss the particular ways in which the service provider's/policy maker's assumptions overlook real circumstances and needs
- make recommendations about how the service/policy/practice could be changed in keeping with the empirical evidence about clients and their circumstances.

Presenting case studies

Summary: Case studies are at their most powerful and accessible when presented as stories. The case study should begin with an outline of the main focus, then tell the story about what happened, and end with the main insights and recommendations. When the case study aims to comment on service provision, then the differences between the typical client's case and the hypothetical will dominate. An executive summary should be inserted at the beginning and should stand alone in telling you the most significant information about the case study and the insights it offers.

17 Different audiences

You might find the following checklist useful in ensuring that your presentation is appropriate for a particular audience:

- 1 Have I understood exactly who my audience is?
- 2 Have I avoided assuming too much prior knowledge (for example, too much jargon or technocratic language)?
- 3 Have I avoided assuming too little prior knowledge – am I being patronising?
- 4 Have I accommodated their particular interests in the topic?
- 5 Have I selected case studies which suit those interests?
- 6 Have I accommodated their time constraints?
- 7 Do I understand what they are used to and what they expect?
- 8 Have I offered them something new and unexpected in keeping with my objective?
- 9 Do I offer them something to act on (e.g. a recommendation, an issue on which to lobby)
- 10 Does the case study/studies pull the appropriate 'strings' to inspire action, empathy, shock, disgust, or contemplation?

You should also refer to the section entitled “What different people want from a case study” (see page 26).

Different audiences

Summary: Always check that you have tailor-made your case study to suit the level of knowledge, interests, time constraints, and expectations of the intended audience. Does the case study offer that audience something surprising, and a concrete recommendation for action? Is there a marriage of content and form to move the audience to think or feel and subsequently to act?

18 What about ethics?

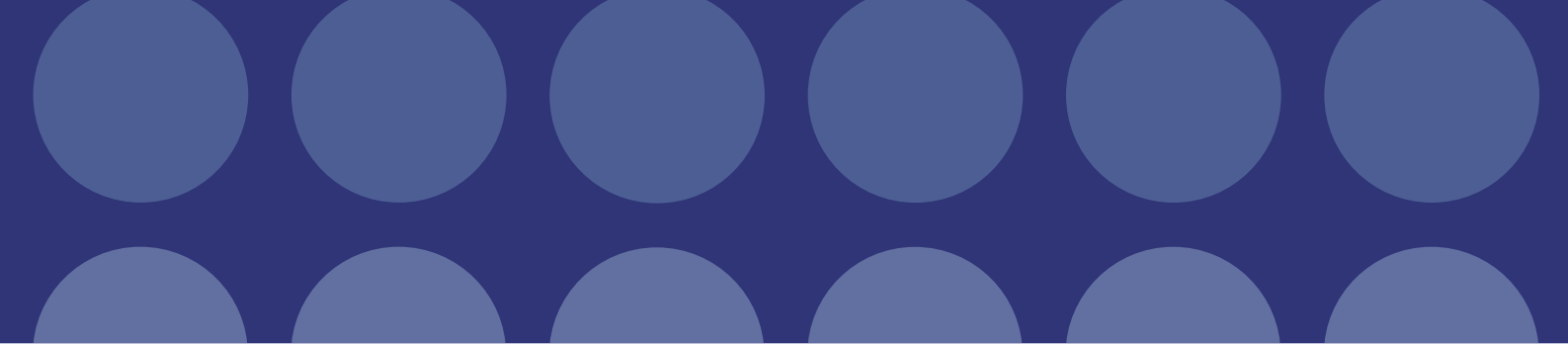
Ethics in case study work is about making decisions which respect the rights of all the stakeholders involved. When we think about ethics and case studies we obviously think of the clients whose experiences form the basis of the case studies. This group of stakeholders constitutes the area of primary ethical concern, because they wear two hats simultaneously – as informants on the one hand, and as intended beneficiaries on the other. Hence we need to protect their interests and their entitlement to privacy and protection under the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA). Consent should be required and anonymity and confidentiality offered in all our negotiations with client-participants about their data and information, even when this is not required by the DPA.

But because of the selective nature of case study work, an additional need for protection is introduced. If we allow or indeed perpetuate a reliance on deviant or extreme cases, we create or reinforce certain stereotypes which doubtlessly undermine the entitlement of less extreme cases to the careful consideration that is their due. Hence whether we are constantly using heroes/heroines or constantly drawing on victim stories, we are conditioning our audience to undervalue at best, or overlook at worst, the majority of cases that fall into the wide spectrum in between. We need to constantly remind the audience of the relationship between the case study being presented and the more typical or representative ones.

When a particular client's experiences are used as the basis for a case study, there is also the principle of reciprocity to consider. What does the client and/or their community benefit from taking the time and effort to share their account or perspective with you? Payment raises ethical dilemmas and should be considered carefully. As people tasked with doing case study work, we need to remember that clients may have certain expectations in relation to the objectives of the project and its intended benefits which need to be understood and discussed openly before the case study information is gathered.

The client also needs to give full and informed consent to their material being used in the context for which it is intended. A standard consent form can be designed or an existing one modified which not only deals with the immediate context in which the case study will be used, but which requests consent for use in subsequent contexts (see discussion and links on www.the-sra.org.uk/ethics02.doc). A guarantee of anonymity is almost always included in keeping with the DPA requirements, as well as the client's simple entitlement to privacy and protection from hostile or discriminatory responses.

We also need to consider our audience. When presenting case studies concerning service provision, the service providers and policy makers themselves are also entitled to ethical treatment. Again, if we always choose to present particularly dire cases, this may have an effect on statutory policies and service provision amendments, and may ultimately influence policy. The resulting policy may therefore be disproportionately biased in favour of the needs and circumstances of a few to the detriment of the many. Again, the injustice is done not only to service providers and policy makers, but to the majority of the intended beneficiaries as well.



The same principle applies to journalists, funders, academics, the public, and of course our own colleagues and management. To ensure as far as possible that case studies are based on evidence, we can gather information and data from different people at different times, and compare across these accounts. This is the basic process of triangulation, or checking the information provided by one source against another. If there is a discrepancy between accounts, rather than privileging one above the other we should present both, citing clearly who offered which account. These discrepancies can be a rich source of insight into tensions or misunderstandings between, for example, service providers and clients, or clients and the media, or even caseworkers and management, which are crucial to understanding a particular situation (see “What questions should we ask to collect case study information?” page 38).

Rule of thumb: All case studies should anonymously present the circumstances and experiences of a client, confirmed by different sources of evidence, and firmly contextualised in a wider population of cases.

Summary: When we do case study work we need to be familiar with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. We must ensure that we first get client’s informed consent, that all personal details are anonymised, and that the case study counters rather than encourages stereotypes. We should use different sources of evidence to ensure that our findings are valid and accurately reflect reality and differences in perspective when these are apparent. If our interpretation of the case study material together with the way in which we present it are well grounded in the evidence, we respect the interests and integrity of all concerned.

19 A good case study

Good case studies already exist. And we are more than capable, given minimal resources and time, of generating them ourselves. If you can answer “Yes” to all the following points, the case study in front of you qualifies as a good one:

▪ **methods**

- a selection: includes how and why a specific case has been selected
- b other cases: covers how the selected case is located relative to other cases/within a broader population of cases
- c type of case: the type of case (extreme/deviant/typical/representative/randomly-selected) is appropriate and is justified
- d limitations: recognises the limits of case study work and the particular limits of the selected case, and overcomes these by also using other sources of data
- e checks and balances: uses different sources of evidence about each case (triangulation)
- f multiple cases: draws insights from commonalities and differences between cases

▪ **content**

- a basics: includes what happened, to whom, in which context
- b perspectives: client’s feedback, interpretations, and suggestions are included alongside those of relevant service providers and other parties
- c lessons: draws out what the case study contributes to our understanding of a particular issue

▪ **ethics**

- a consent: client consent has been obtained to use her/his case information as data
- b respect: doesn’t treat the client or any other party as an object or abstract
- c data protection: excludes personal details which render the client vulnerable or open to identification, abuse, discrimination, or harassment
- d evidence: every statement is grounded in empirical evidence
- e extreme cases: are used to fight rather than encourage stereotypes

▪ **presentation**

- a accessible: it is understandable across all relevant levels of knowledge, experience, and interest found in the intended audience
- b relevant: it relates directly to the interests and concerns of the intended audience
- c source: provides an author, source, and date when the case study was published or presented. Ideally a date should also be included referring to when the case study data was originally gathered or when data for the selected case was last updated.

continued...

- d evidence/interpretation: it makes clear the distinction between primary evidence (quotations) and the author's interpretation
- e balances problems and solutions: it presents the difficulties illustrated by cases alongside relevant recommendations about how the project, organisation, or audience could help to overcome the difficulties
- f undemanding: it is neither too long, nor too linguistically or emotionally demanding for the intended audience
- g further research: it proposes ways of furthering or confirming findings
- h flow: it reads like an interesting story well-told

20 A bad case study

Sadly we are surrounded by bad case studies! If you can answer “No” to any of the above questions relating to a good case study, the case study in front of you qualifies as problematic. A bad case study – as opposed to just a problematic one – tends, in addition, to commit the following mistakes:

▪ **methods**

‘representative’ cases: it describes cases as representative of a UK population of refugees or asylum seekers or of a particular urban population, when we know these to be invisible populations.

▪ **ethics**

melodrama: it presents extreme cases purely for sensational effect

▪ **presentation**

arguable interpretation: it could be used to support opposing perspectives, but is instead used to support a particular perspective not on the basis of evidence, but on the basis of the convictions and interests of the person or organisation using it.

evidence or interpretation?: it is unclear where the evidence ends and the interpretation begins.

The best way to counter a bad case study is to ask questions of it in front of the intended audience which will elicit responses revealing the lack of evidence or rigor. The following questions may be useful:

- How many cases did you consider before selecting this case?
- How and why did you select this case?
- How many cases are there like this one?
- How and by whom, where, and when was the information for this case study gathered?
- Is this case representative or typical? On the basis of what statistical evidence?
- Have you obtained consent from the client to use this case study in this way? Can you provide evidence of this?
- Do you believe your use of this case study to be ethical i.e. that the rights and entitlements of some are not privileged above the rights and entitlements of others?
- Who benefits the most from this particular case study and its recommendations?
- How does this case study accommodate change over time (whether in terms of the case itself or in terms of the broader context)?
- Could your conclusions be applied to the following case/s (citing cases which are neither extreme nor deviant but, according to your evidence, more typical)?

Good and bad case studies

Summary:

- Good case studies demonstrate rigorous methods, content appropriate to the objective and include the perspectives of all relevant parties, a respect for ethics, and are presented appropriately for the intended audience.
- Bad case studies fail on at least one of the above-mentioned areas, or mislead an audience by describing a case as representative when it isn't, use extreme cases purely for sensational purposes, interpret the evidence in a partial way, or blur the distinction between evidence and interpretation.
- Certain questions can be used to counter bad case studies, as can case studies grounded in evidence.

21 Summary

- A case study is a story about what happened in a particular set of circumstances.
- Usually case studies are about the experience and circumstances of a particular person or family.
- Refugees and asylum seekers in the UK are invisible populations – we can't know how many of them there are in the country at any given time or trace statistical trends across the populations.
- Case studies can tell us about specific cases in context in the form of accessible stories.
- Case studies also provide an opportunity to include clients' responses and suggestions.
- Most of the time findings from case studies are neither representative, nor generalisable.
- Case studies do not tell us about the extent to which something is happening.
- We can use case studies to evaluate a project or service, to explore what is happening, to use contextual information to explain why something is happening, and to monitor change.
- Case studies can also be used to lobby, to report to funders, and for fundraising.
- Different people have different expectations from a case study.
- We need to ensure that we consider the following about our intended audience when selecting, analysing, and presenting our case study: language, level of prior knowledge, length and detail, relevant concerns and pressures, and that the case selected matches the objective.
- There are six different types of cases, namely: representative, typical, deviant, extreme, randomly-selected, and accessible cases.
- Your objective and the prior knowledge available will often dictate which type of case you use.
- Different types of cases have different prerequisites which need to be checked before you start.
- Always justify which type of case study you use.
- Multiple case studies are useful, but not always practically possible.
- Before embarking on a multiple case study, check the time and resource constraints of the author, organisation generating the case study, funder, participating client/s if interviewing, and those of the intended audience.
- In a multiple case study, comparisons across time intervals and demographic groups are recommended.
- Ideally case studies should include evidence from a range of different sources and a range of different forms of data such as qualitative interview material and statistics.
- Profiles (such as the demographic profile and the service-user profile) covering a wide range of important details help us to gather case study material systematically.

- Analysing case study information is simply about extracting relevant information in order to retell the story of that case/s in relation to a particular focus or theme.
- Most of the time we use case studies in this sector to comment on service provision or policy.
- Comparing a typical client's case with the hypothetical client implied in policy or practice guidelines can help us to highlight the gap between service provision and client needs when lobbying about an existing policy or practice.
- Case studies are most powerful when presented as stories.
- Each case study should include an executive summary, focus, and methods, and should explain how this case relates to other cases, the client, their circumstances, what happened, what this case teaches us, and what we should do about it i.e. recommendations.
- Always know as much as possible about your intended audience when preparing a case study for dissemination, avoid being either demanding or patronising, and emphasise new insights and concrete recommendations.
- Good case studies demonstrate rigorous methods, have content appropriate to the objective, include the perspectives of all relevant parties, demonstrate a respect for ethics, and use a presentation appropriate to the intended audience.
- Bad case studies fail in at least one of the above-mentioned areas, or mislead an audience by describing a case as representative when it isn't, use extreme cases purely for sensational purposes, interpret the evidence in a partial way, or blur the distinction between evidence and interpretation.
- Certain questions, often concerning methods, can be used to counter bad case studies, as can case studies grounded in evidence that offer different findings.
- Authors of case studies should be familiar with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.
- All case studies should anonymously present the circumstances, experiences, and perspectives of a client, confirmed by different sources of evidence, and contextualised with reference to a wider population of cases.

22 Good case study checklist

Does your case study include:

- 1 an executive summary (summarising the findings together with the main recommendations)?
- 2 an author?
- 3 a date (when the case study information was gathered, and when the case study was first presented or published)?
- 4 a generating organisation?
- 5 an introduction (get the audience interested!)?
- 6 an objective (what you want to achieve with this case study)?
- 7 a description of methods (explaining the selection of cases and decisions about how the information was gathered, analysed, and presented)?
- 8 the relationship of this case to other cases (its location in a wider population, and whether it is typical or deviant etc)?
- 9 the social background (historical, geographical, and political context – the wider circumstances)?
- 10 the case background (case history when relevant, and current circumstances)?
- 11 an account of what happened (using a range of different sources of evidence and different perspectives)?
- 12 an account of what we can learn from this case (summary of significant features)?
- 13 recommendations (how can this case be used to improve our understanding or refine the services or support offered)?
- 14 suggestions for additional research to deepen or confirm findings?
- 15 conclusions?
- 16 appendices (e.g. if casework data is used, a casework form can be included, and/or an interview schedule, and/or a consent form, when applicable)?

In a multiple case study, step eight would become more detailed. There would either be case-by-case summaries or recommendations, or these could be synthesised into a series of recommendations and conclusions at the end of the presentation.

The amount of time and attention given to nine and 10 depends on the audience, time, and other resource constraints.

23 Recommended reading

- Babbie E 1998. *The Practice of Social Research*. London: Wadsworth
- Denzin NK and Lincoln YS 2000. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage
- Gilham B 2000. *Case Study Research Methods*. London: Continuum
- Hamel J 1994. *Case Study Methods*. London: Sage
- Neuman WL 2003. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. London: Allyn and Bacon
- Scholz RW 2002. *Embedded Case Study Methods, Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Knowledge*. London: Sage
- Stake RE 1995. *The Art of Case Study Research, Perspectives on Practice*. London: Sage
- Yin RK 1993. *Applications of Case Study Research*. London: Sage
- Yin RK 2002. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. London: Sage

24 Glossary

accessible case: Case which is already known and which is, for one reason or another, a convenient case to use.

case: An existing unit of human activity e.g. an individual, family, group, or institution.

case study: Information synthesised most often into a story, focusing on the experiences and circumstances of a particular individual, family or group, presented in a temporal, spatial, and socio-cultural context.

data: Numerical and non-numerical forms of information or evidence systematically gathered according to rules or established procedures.

deviant case: An uncommon case which deviates from the norm, whose characteristics differ from those of typical or representative cases.

exploratory research: Research into an area that has not been studied, for purposes of developing initial ideas and/or a more focused research question or research instrument.

extreme case: A case judged to be in the worst or best situation or position, selected for its capacity to inspire emotion, shock, or action.

generalisability: Ability to draw a conclusion about a population of cases on the basis of either a randomly selected sample of cases or on the basis of a representative case.

information: Catch-all term for relevant knowledge on a particular topic, regardless of partiality or the methods used to gather it.

instrumental case: Case simply selected to suit a particular research focus or interest.

instrument: Also referred to as a research instrument, this is a structured data gathering tool prepared in advance, such as a survey or questionnaire or an aide memoire used to guide an interview. This assists in gathering consistent and therefore comparable data across a series of cases.

intervention: A project, service, or involvement in a given situation designed to change the situation in some way.

invisible population: A population whose cases cannot be identified, the size and characteristics of which can never be fully known.

life story interviews: Interview in which an individual provides an account of her or his life with the support of an interviewer.

longitudinal research: Research involving the gathering of data at different intervals in time.

multiple case study research: Research drawing on more than one case study simultaneously, using comparisons between cases as an additional source of insight.

population of cases: All the cases satisfying stipulated criteria, such as status and/or country of origin and/or gender and/or geographical area.

qualitative research: Research drawing on non-numeric information in the form of words, pictures, sounds, visual images, or objects.

quantitative research: Research drawing on numeric information.

random sample: Set of cases selected randomly from a population of cases which can be used as a basis for generalisations about the population as a whole. All the cases within the population stood an equal chance of being selected.

randomly selected case: A case which has been selected randomly and not because of one or other characteristic. All the cases within the population stood an equal chance of being selected.

relevance: Having a recognisable connection to a given situation or discussion.

representative case: A case sharing all the characteristics judged to be common across a group or population of cases.

sample: Smaller set of cases selected from a wider pool of cases, but not necessarily randomly selected. Hence not all samples can be used as the basis of generalisations about the population.

sampling frame: A list of all the cases in a given population.

survey: Data gathering tool used to collect structured or semi-structured data, most often quantitative data, consistently across a series of cases.

triangulation: Practice of checking the information provided by one source against information provided by another source/s, perceived as an indicator of methodological rigor.

typical case: A case reflecting characteristics observed as common across a set of cases.

variable: A measure of a concept which can vary in value.

25 Appendix A – ‘demo’ case study

Preamble

The following is an example of a typical case study developed as a ‘demo’ case study. All details, characters, and findings are fictitious. The case study is presented by a fictitious agency called Refugees at Work in support of a fictitious fundraising application in which the project entitled “Training RCOs to help refugees do what they do best” is being proposed.

Executive summary

- Alma’s story is a typical case study on the obstacles to refugee labour market integration in the UK.
- Alma’s case is one of three refugee cases selected to support a fundraising application for the proposed project “Training RCOs to help refugees do what they do best”.
- Alma’s transcript reveals that she encountered a number of difficulties in finding sustainable employment in the UK over the first decade of her new life here.
- When she did find ‘unskilled/semi-skilled’ employment as a waitress and a nanny, problems with language, workplace discrimination, and unfair labour practices exacerbated her experience.
- This situation indicates an urgent need for Refugees at Work to train staff in RCOs to refer refugees like Alma to the appropriate service providers that assist with employment and labour market integration, as well as services dealing with racial discrimination cases.
- Without RCO support, individuals like Alma are likely to continue to languish in employment in which they feel undervalued, over-skilled, and defeated.
- Without adequate employment advice and preparation for refugees, the UK general public will continue to be deprived of the potential contribution of skilled and experienced refugees.

Introduction

Alma’s case is one of three cases selected for presentation by Refugees at Work in support of a funding application for its proposed project “Training RCOs to help refugees do what they do best”.

The case studies illustrate the need for a project that would train RCOs to refer clients to specialist service providers assisting with employment and labour market integration, and with how to deal with complaints about racial discrimination in the workplace.

Case Selection

Alma’s case was selected from WORKDATA – the casework database of Refugees at Work because it demonstrated typical dimensions of the refugee experience of working in the UK. This case qualified as a typical case on the basis of our last casework audit. This audit included 2029 cases, and is described in detail in the organisation’s 2002/2003

Annual Report. The demographic findings of the audit indicated that:

- Refugees currently in employment have an average age of 34.2 years
- Women in employment outnumber men in employment (67 per cent of the total cases were female)
- The numbers of those in manual labour employment ('Unskilled or semi-skilled': 83 per cent of total cases) far exceeded those employed in other capacities ('Skilled/technical': 13 per cent of total cases; 'Managerial': four per cent of total cases)
- The numbers of those with university education far exceeded numbers in skilled/technical and managerial employment (university qualification: 34 per cent of total cases as compared with 17 per cent of total cases for skilled/technical and managerial combined)

The numbers in employment for different refugee populations varied greatly, but this is a reflection of the particular casework demographics currently characterising our organisation's work rather than a direct reflection of comparable employment experiences of different refugee populations: Bosnians (29 per cent of total cases), Sri Lankans (26 per cent of total cases), Somalis (18 per cent of total cases), Palestinians (11 per cent of total cases), Iraqis (nine per cent of total cases) and Afghanistanis (five per cent of total cases).

The findings relating to employment experiences indicated that:

- Most of the clients reported being over skilled for their current jobs (79 per cent of total cases)
- Most of the clients reported having tried to find work in the profession in which they worked before coming to the UK (89 per cent of total cases)
- Of those who tried, a very small percentage found employment in their chosen profession within the first five years of being in the UK (8 per cent of those who tried)
- Clients with a university education outnumbered those from other educational backgrounds in complaining of 'a dramatic drop in income and social status' since arriving in the UK (77 per cent of university educated cases as compared with 49 per cent of non-university educated cases).
- There was a gender divide reported by many women (67 per cent of total female cases), who found domestic employment more easily than employment in their chosen professions.
- Most of the clients interviewed had experienced feeling 'undervalued' by colleagues and/or customers/clients in the workplace (79 per cent of total cases)
- Of these clients, many (69 per cent of undervalued cases) believed that this sense of being undervalued was 'at least partially related to my racial, ethnic, linguistic, or national identity' or 'to coming from outside the UK'.
- Most of the clients interviewed reported that colleagues and/or customers/clients believed 'non-UK qualifications were worth less than UK qualifications' (89 per cent of total cases).

Alma's case therefore qualifies as a typical case in that:

- She is a woman
- She was 39 years old at the time of her first casework interview
- She describes alienation at work, a sense of loss and frustration at both the perceived impossibility of finding the type of employment she is willing and trained to do, and the lifestyle adjustment necessitated by the lower wages she now earns
- She reported feeling 'undervalued' by colleagues and/or customers/clients, and explained this as 'at least partially related to my racial, ethnic, linguistic or national identity'.

Alma also consented to our approaching her for an additional interview should we wish to use her case for case study purposes. An hour-long telephone interview was subsequently conducted by the caseworker who first dealt with her case.

Alma's case helps to illustrate the urgent need to better inform and support refugees in their pursuit of stimulating employment, and the need to provide them with advice on what to do and where to go when they experience racial discrimination in the workplace.

The case study: Alma's story

Alma (39) lives with her partner, Hamo (42) and two children, Selma (five) and Amir (three) in a council flat in Wandsworth. Alma came to the UK in December 1992. She applied for asylum immediately and received Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) in November 1993. This meant that she had the same rights to education, training, and employment as the rest of the UK population.

Within a week of being granted her ILR status Alma began investigating work prospects in her profession. Alma has a degree in dentistry from the University of Sarajevo. She had been to a cultural event organised by a Bosnian refugee community organisation (RCO) where she met the RCO caseworker who told her to stop by anytime she needed help settling in. Alma went to their office and the caseworker referred her to a Bosnian dentist who advised her to do a conversion course to qualify for an equivalent dentistry qualification in the UK – information she was unable to confirm when her attempts to contact a professional association for dentists failed.

"He told me that if dentistry was what I wanted, I would have to go back and study some more like he did – after six years of university and five years in practice. This would mean I wouldn't be earning and after the war and everything I was just too tired."

So Alma started work at a local restaurant.

"I found a waitressing job at a Tapas Bar. For those five months I hated getting up in the morning. And I hated the way that some of the customers would pretend they

couldn't understand the language I was speaking, when I was speaking English. I was always tired. The owner paid me £20 basic for each shift, and then we all got tips on top of our basic. I thought we were all paid the same, but one day Max the barman told me the English waiters got £30 basic. I asked the manager and he just laughed and said I should be grateful for the job. On a good night I would earn between £40 and £60 with tips, but that was mostly on weekends. But on a bad night and weeknights were never as good as weekends, I would sometimes go home with around £30, including my basic. I never knew until just before I left that I could put myself down for the shifts I wanted. Everyone else had been choosing when they wanted to work. Nobody told me. I just came to work whenever my name was down."

Then Alma had to leave.

"One waiter stole from the till. Then the owner who had put a 'service charge' on the bills, refused to give us our money until someone owned up. That waiter disappeared but we never got our money. So I left too – I had to borrow money to pay my rent which was £65 a week."

In January 1994 having received his ILR status, the same Bosnian RCO assisted Hamo to apply for a disability benefit on the basis of spinal problems which had begun in the camps where he was detained during the Bosnian war. However, after Alma gave birth to Sana in October 1994, Hamo began working as a tiler on the black market to supplement the family's income.

But after a year, Hamo's back pain became intolerable and the couple decided that Alma should go back to work. At this time the couple were invited to another cultural event organised by the Bosnian RCO. It was there that the caseworker who Alma had previously met suggested she contact a friend who needed a secretary. His name was Allan and he ran a Coin Exchange in Knightsbridge. He needed an office administrator to do filing, correspondence, and receptionist duties. Alma got the job and has been there ever since.

"He is a good man. And my salary and hours are better than before. But it's boring and my brain goes to sleep. Every day is the same. A client came in the other day who was a dentist. I told him that I was also a dentist. He just smiled and asked me to please make sure that Mr Bjornerman got his message. I don't think that he believed me. Or maybe he thought dentists in Former Yugoslavia trained for six months and then take out teeth all day with pliers."

Alma is worried about the future:

"The salary is fine now, but when the children grow up I want them to be able to go to university here. Otherwise they will end up like me. But in England you have to pay. We won't be able to afford to pay for both of them, and even if we can save up for one – how do we decide? The disability benefit helps and Hamo is doing his best – odd jobs for his friend when he needs him. But I always feel bad because there is so much pain and then he can't even play with the children."

Case discussion

Alma's case highlights several ways in which refugees are currently being both disadvantaged and discouraged from pursuing work in their chosen profession. Individuals like Alma have reported feeling undervalued due to language and attitudes which assume that non-English qualifications 'don't count'.

Individuals can feel defeated and frustrated at not being able to access work for which, to use Alma's words, "I have been trained: five years of studies and almost the same of work experience!" Refugees can feel patronised and deskilled by the jobs to which they are granted access.

But one of the gravest unforeseen consequences of the inaccessibility of the current employment situation, is that skilled refugees initially enthusiastic to apply their knowledge and experience in their chosen professions, feel that they are being "closed out" for a second time, just because "I am who I am" (Alma 2003). This sense of 'being discriminated against', of 'being an outsider', was commonly described across the cases in our casework database, regardless of gender, age, and qualifications (in 63 per cent of cases that reported feeling 'undervalued').

Recommendations and conclusions

Alma's case highlights the need for urgent intervention to enable refugees to participate in the labour market without fear of racial discrimination in ways which fulfil their potential both as human beings with aspirations as well as skilled and experienced colleagues with a valuable contribution to make. The case also throws up a series of social needs that we cannot expect public sector agencies to meet.

Because RCOs feature in services-received case histories as the 'first port of call' for the employed refugee and have the added advantage of access and language, these organisations should be trained:

- a to refer clients to service providers equipped to provide advice and support to refugees looking for employment and training in their chosen profession, and to contact The National Academic Recognition Information Centre for the UK (NARIC) and appropriate professional bodies on behalf of professional refugees
- b to refer clients to appropriate service providers dealing with racial discrimination in the workplace.

It also illustrates the need for NARIC and the appropriate professional bodies (e.g. the British Dental Association in this case), to consider how to combine flexibility with professional standards, and to develop short updating and bridging courses so that the UK is not deprived of the skills of refugees.

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