



National Centre for Research Methods

Telephone Methods Toolkit

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Abstract

The pandemic has prompted many social scientists to rethink their research methods and adapt to researching in ways that accommodate social distancing rules. Telephone interviews offer a remote route to fieldwork but their value for researchers extends beyond the pandemic. This toolkit considers the role of telephone interviewing in qualitative research and the advantages and challenges of this method and attendant practical and ethical questions. We provide practical reflections around how to address the challenges associated with telephone interviews and draw on examples from current research.

Keywords: Telephone interviews; connection; connectivity; qualitative research; ethics; recruitment

1. Introduction

Telephone interviews are a valuable method for generating qualitative data and conducting fieldwork at a distance. Compared to the face-to-face equivalent, this method is flexible, less intrusive and may help balance researcher-participant power dynamics. They are also generally a less resource-intensive approach because they eliminate or reduce travel time and costs. They may also be a preference for participants. Telephone interviews are a well-established qualitative research method, yet historically they have presented as inferior to those that take place face-to-face and are used less often. Indeed, some handbooks on qualitative research make no mention of this method at all because they are still often associated with quantitative or survey data collection. A growing body of methodological literature, however, has questioned their inferiority (Deakin & Wakefield 2014; Holt 2010; Novick 2008; Vogl 2013).

A key concern is that telephone interviews make it more difficult to establish rapport with participants. This is explained in part by the limited ability for researchers to see and respond to visual cues or body language (Wilson and Edwards 2003). While these can be useful tools for

qualitative researchers when forming relationships with participants, telephone interviews still facilitate relationships, as well as the generation of quality data, albeit in different but nonetheless valuable ways. The use of telephone interviews might also be seen as a form of ‘methodological pragmatism’ (Lamont & Swidler 2014) (see ‘*Tales from the Field*’ box 1.1) whereby their justification is rooted in their feasibility compared to other methods. The researchers’ decision to use them, for example, may be dependent on context. This was the case during the lockdowns and physical distancing rules associated with Covid-19, which meant that social researchers were challenged to rethink the methods they use, creating unanticipated opportunities for innovation and creativity (Nind, Meckin & Coverdale 2021). With face-to-face interviews no longer a possibility, many social researchers turned to a variety of remote methods such as diary writing, surveys and online interviews. Here we focus on qualitative telephone interviews as part of this broader repertoire of qualitative, digitally mediated methods, setting out why they are both valuable and reliable. We also offer practical guidance on how to conduct them. Drawing upon our experiences and the lessons learned from the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funded research study, [Following Young Fathers Further](#) (hereafter FYFF), we illustrate strategies and worked examples of how we adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic by conducting interviews over the telephone.

We order this toolkit around the themes of *connection*, which captures how relationships are built with participants at a distance and *connectivity*, referring to the challenges and opportunities associated with digitally mediated forms of communication in fieldwork.

Box 1.1 *Tales from the Field*

Funded by the [UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship scheme](#), ‘Following Young Fathers Further’ (FYFF) is a four-year qualitative longitudinal study exploring the parenting trajectories and support needs of young fathers (aged 25 and under). In FYFF, the decision to use telephone interviews was driven by ‘methodological pragmatism’ (Lamont & Swidler 2014). FYFF builds on an existing baseline study called [Following Young Fathers](#), a qualitative longitudinal study based on interviews and we needed to produce comparable data e.g., interview transcripts. We also consulted with participants about their preferences for conducting interviews at a distance.

Social distancing rules and lockdown also meant that face-to-face interviewing was prohibited. The team therefore needed to consider how we might conduct the fieldwork remotely. Early in the process, we considered ethical questions around whether it would be appropriate to conduct research at a time of global crisis. We were driven to capture the voices of this marginalised and otherwise invisible participant group and to capture their experiences for the historical record. Telephone interviews enabled us to conduct the fieldwork in ways that did not create undue risk for participants and the research team.

2. Why use telephone interviews?

With a myriad of tools available to conduct qualitative research, why choose interviewing by phone? Telephone interviews confer a range of benefits for the researcher, the participant and in terms of the quality of the data generated. This method can make participation in research more accessible for participants and ensure reach to a broader demographic (Glogowska et al 2010).

The flexibility and potential for anonymity with telephone interviews may also make this method more attractive to participants as we found in our research (see Box 2.1).

In what follows, we document some of the main advantages and challenges of telephone interviews drawing on relevant methodological literatures.

Advantages

Accessibility: Telephone interviews can be more inclusive. Participants do not require internet access and can receive incoming calls for free. They can also be more accessible when travelling to an interview is not possible for participants and/or researcher.

Participant control: Telephone interviews offer participants greater control over withdrawing their participation (e.g. by merely 'hanging up') and potentially greater control over the privacy of the interview (Holt 2010).

'Pseudonymity' (Wilson et al 1998): Telephone interviews can guarantee a level of anonymity (Novick 2008) which might lead to participants feeling comfortable broaching sensitive issues that they would otherwise had they been face-to-face (Glogowska et al 2010).

Participant preferences: Telephone interviews are sometimes the preferred choice of participants. Respecting this preference and responding appropriately and flexibly can help with democratising the research process and is important in research that is co-produced. See *Tales from the Field* box 2.1 below.

'Interviewer invisibility' (Oppenheim 1992 cited in Glogowska et al 2010): Interviewer bias might be minimised when researchers and participants are not co-present (Vogl 2013). Holt (2010) argues that the lack of visual cues actually limit power imbalances around social differences.

Quality: Telephone interviewing may generate richer data due to its more focused nature (Vogl 2013). Indeed, in the absence

Challenges (and ways to address these)

Accessibility: Telephone interviews are only possible when participants own or have access to a telephone. Researchers might consider providing telephones for participants who do not have access to one, but this is dependent on funding and can also pose further ethical considerations around loss, damage and/or theft.

Building rapport: A criticism commonly levelled at telephone interviews (in comparison to those conducted face-to-face), is that the lack of co-presence can impact, or indeed, limit, rapport and therefore response quality. We discuss ways of building rapport at a distance in our section on the process of doing telephone interviews below.

Social differences: Telephone interviews entail a loss of visible cues about the identities of participants and researchers and in relation to class, gender and ethnicity (Holt 2010), which may have unintended implications for how participants respond to questions. It might also be harder for the researcher to be reflexive about social differences operating in the interaction because these cues are less observable.

Quality of data reduced: Data from telephone interviewing have been described as lacking quality due to the loss of contextual and non-verbal data (Holt 2010; Novick 2008).

Recruitment and retention: The flexibility of telephone interviews is a strength, yet they are also more straightforward to cancel, meaning it may still prove challenging to secure a date and time (based on our research experience).

The remote nature of telephone interviews has been said to increase the likelihood of

of non-verbal cues, more about the context has to be articulated by both the researcher and participants (Holt 2010).

Note-taking: While not being able to see a participant is often considered a disadvantage, it can also be useful for researchers. When on the telephone there is more opportunity to consult the interview schedule and to take notes about the interview without participants being aware. In face-to-face interviews, it can be distracting, and perhaps even disconcerting, for participants to see the interviewer taking notes and can disrupt the conversational flow of the interview.

Not just 1-1: There is flexibility for telephone conferencing calls or participants may use speakerphone so others in the same room can participate too.

Flexibility: This is a real advantage, especially for participants. You may be able to offer interview times outside of normal working hours for example and they only need to commit time to the interview itself.

participants withdrawing from the research with no or little notice (Deakin & Wakefield 2014).

Disruptions: There may be unanticipated interruptions and distractions to telephone interviews. This is not necessarily a bad thing. These may actually provide greater, unexpected insight into the lives and social contexts of the participants. Depending on where the participant chooses to do their interview, you may hear the presence of their family or friends, which may prompt further discussion (see Box 2.2 below).

Privacy: Participants' privacy (or lack thereof) may be an issue. Questions may need to be altered or left out, especially if they are sensitive and if your participant expresses discomfort about answering in front of others. It is therefore vital to establish if anyone else is present before starting the interview.

Emotional toll: Researchers might be tempted to conduct numerous telephone interviews in one day. However, interviews can be both mentally and emotionally demanding. Telephone interviews in particular require a high level of concentration, perhaps more so than face-to-face interviews because there is less physical connection to participants and both researcher and participant may become distracted.

Box 2.1 *Tales from the Field*

In the FYFF study, eight participants were re-accessed from a previous, baseline study ([Following Young Fathers](#), Neale et al. 2015). These young men were known to members of the research team already and had already taken part in up to five face-to-face interviews. We were therefore able to ask them to reflect upon their experiences of being interviewed on the telephone compared to face-to-face. Overall, being interviewed by telephone was preferred by the participants for reasons other than that they were a necessity in the pandemic context. They allowed greater flexibility for the participants, and some said that it impacted positively on their emotional response to questions asked in the interview. One participant commented on the fact that he could walk around and smoke whilst taking part in the telephone interview, which helped him to calm his nerves.

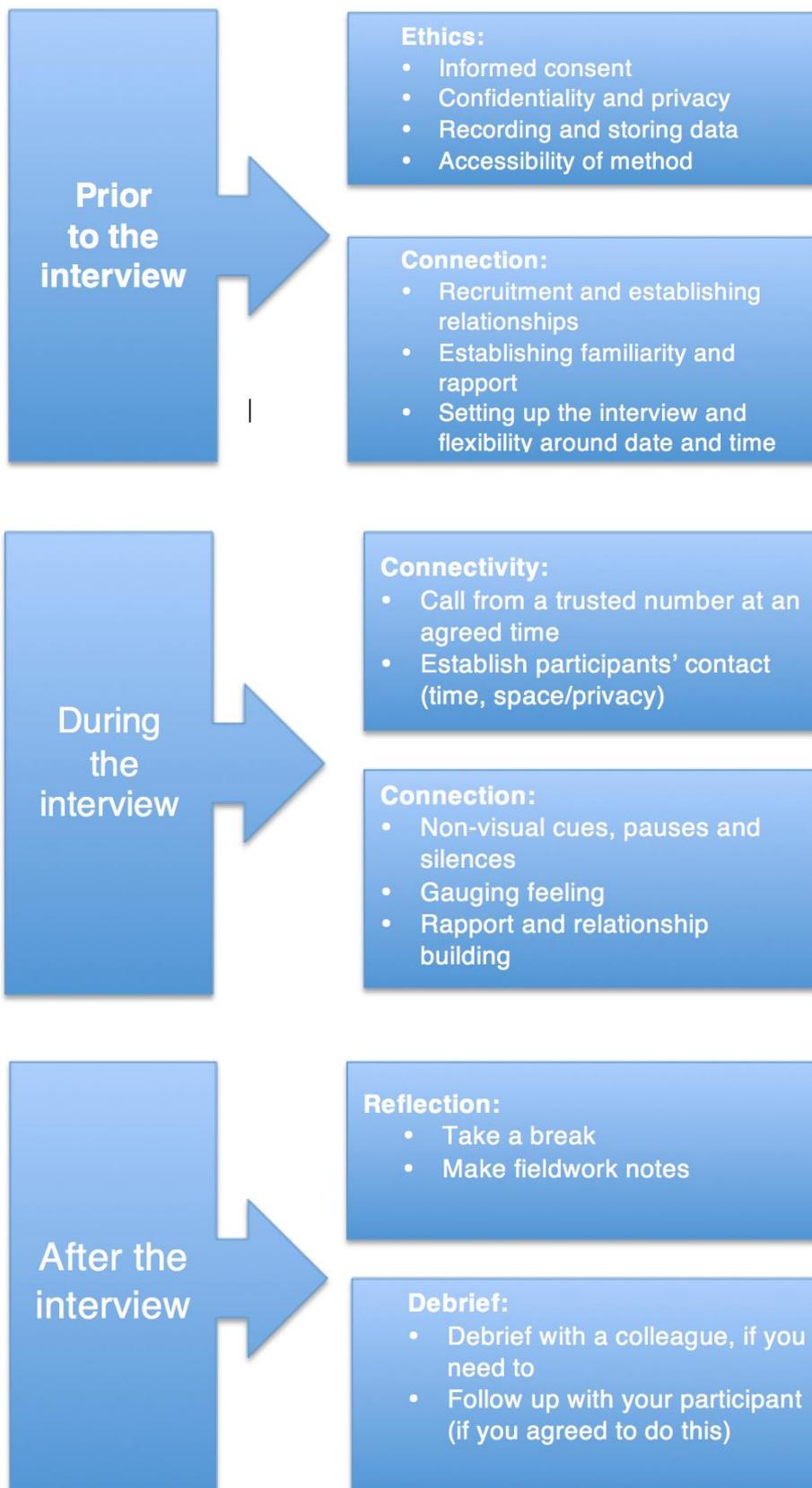
Box 2.2 *Tales from the Field*

Some of the young fathers we interviewed over the phone had their babies and children with them. This gave us an opportunity to hear how they interacted with their children. For example, one dad fed and played with his baby throughout his interview. This prompted discussions around the researcher and participants' shared identities as parents and prompted additional reflections on his role as a father. We were able to gain novel insights in relation to the themes of gender roles and caring responsibilities. Subsequently, we have also refined our methodology to introduce a photovoice task to the next wave of fieldwork so that we can capture these interactions visually as well as verbally.

3. The process of using telephone interviews

Figure 1 presents the process of conducting telephone interviews, tracing requirements and considerations before, during and after their use. Woven through these are two key themes – connection and connectivity. These refer to two key aspects of the research process that are important to consider when conducting qualitative telephone interviews. Connection refers to the processes of recruiting participants, establishing a research relationship and maintaining this over time at a distance. Connectivity captures the interactions researchers have with participants over the phone and the ethical and practical issues that these entail (Tarrant et al., *forthcoming*).

Figure 1 The telephone interview process



4. Telephone Interviews and ethics

Research should adhere to ethical codes of practice and ethical approval should be secured by all researchers from their institution or organisation. Ensuring you are clear about the potential ethical challenges posed by your research method and how you will address these is key to any proactive ethical research strategy. We now discuss some of the ethical challenges posed by telephone interviews and how these might be addressed. We cover informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and the recording and storing of data.

4.1 Informed Consent

Gaining informed consent from research participants is an essential part of any research process. The researcher must ensure that participants act freely in giving their consent and that they do so knowing what it is they are consenting to (Davies 2006). How informed consent is gained needs to be considered reflexively, with due consideration of the participant group and research context, the research method(s) being used, and sometimes with consideration of the wider context in which the research is being carried out. An example of how we communicated project information to our participants in a context-sensitive way (prior to asking for their consent) is offered below (see *Tales from the Field* box 4.1).

In a face-to-face interview, researchers typically print out information sheets and consent forms and ask participants to sign them at the start of an interview. This is not always feasible when researching at a distance and/or over the telephone. There are various modes for gaining informed consent that are better suited to telephone interviews. Printed documents may be posted or sent digitally. Digital resources such as electronic information sheets and online consent forms, for example, might be sent in advance. Where gatekeepers are involved in the research, they may also be able to pass on information sheets and consent forms to participants.

All such decisions require careful consideration. Some questions to consider might include:

1. Does the research have the funds required to cover postage and the provision of stamped addressed envelopes so participants can return the forms?
 - a) How long will this process take, and will it delay participation?
 - b) What burden does this represent to participants, especially if they are marginalised or vulnerable?
2. Do the participants have the digital literacy and/or digital provision to access and complete online information sheets and/or consent forms?
3. Is recorded verbal consent more appropriate than written consent? What factors might determine this?
4. Are the project information and consent forms presented in ways that are accessible to participants and inclusive of their needs?

Additional care is needed when seeking informed consents with vulnerable and/or marginalised participants including how this can be secured in an appropriate and accessible way at a distance. Gatekeepers who are already known to the participant might be able to support this process. When researching with young children, parents/guardians will also need to consent as well. It is

important to remember that research is a process and consent often needs to be (re)negotiated with participants over time. It may therefore need to be revisited or re-gained over the course of a research project or study (Davis 2006; Neale 2021).

Box 4.1 *Tales from the Field*

In the FYFF study we considered how to ensure that the project information was accessible to the young men with whom we were researching. Carrying out remote, telephone interviews with young dads in the context of a pandemic prompted us to create online information sheets and consent forms. Advice from our project partners, namely family support professionals who have a remit to support young fathers, highlighted that these would be potentially burdensome to participants, especially those with literacy and language challenges (Tarrant et al. *forthcoming*). We therefore also created a video detailing the project information and offered them the option of providing verbal consent. This aligned with our investments in establishing and maintaining research connections, and with the ethos of coproduction underpinning the research process. In consulting with project partners and the young dads, the video enabled the acquisition of informed consent at a distance and engendered trust and rapport early in the research process.



You can watch the video here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0LIJjOk6R0>

To summarise, the options for gaining informed consent when carrying out telephone interviews are:

1. Send the study information and consent forms in the post with a self-addressed and stamped envelope for participants to respond to,
2. Send information electronically to participants. Response could be via email/social media or through a linked survey using platforms such as Qualtrics or Google Forms,
3. Gain verbal consent over the phone and audio record it.

4.2 Confidentiality and Privacy

Confidentiality and privacy may be more challenging for researchers to manage when researching over the telephone. It is important to check in with participants at the start of the interview regarding where they are and who they are with, and to ask them whether they are comfortable with privacy levels. Mobile phones allow for greater flexibility in terms of moving about and relocating and can offer the participant a certain degree of control and flexibility over their privacy. However, if they are mobile or do not remain in one place, they may be negotiating privacy concerns throughout the interview.

It is also important to think about confidentiality and privacy at the researcher's end too. If the participant is on speakerphone for recording purposes, for example, they may be overheard. In the pandemic many researchers were also working from home and had to identify somewhere quiet and private to carry out the interview free from interruptions. Identifying a quiet, private space in advance of the interview if possible should reduce the potential for disruption.

4.3 Recording and Storing Data

As with any kind of fieldwork involving conversations with participants, careful thought regarding the recording and storage of data is required. Recording a qualitative interview is likely to produce greater accuracy and lead to improved data quality than taking notes by hand at the time. Indeed, most forms of interview analysis require a full transcript. A key question to consider here is how the interview will be recorded. There are various options. If interviewing by telephone it is often possible to use the speaker function and record using a Dictaphone or similar device. There are also some mobile apps that allow for the recording of calls, or you can use an in-ear recording device. Zoom, Teams or Skype all have a recording tool, however, if you want to conduct interviews using these platforms then bear in mind that there is sometimes a separate charge for calling a telephone number. Recordings should then be transferred to an online password protected storage area (backed up in an equally secure area) and original recordings deleted from devices straight away. It can be useful to determine a good system for naming files in advance of recording for future reference (Lobe, Morgan & Hoffman 2020).

5. Connection: before the interview ('groundwork')

Building good relationships and connecting with participants is the hallmark of all qualitative research. Being transparent and open with participants; respecting boundaries while also providing friendly prompts and reminders; and seeking to understand the context of the interview, are all essential to establishing and maintaining rapport with participants, especially when conducting an interview using the telephone. In what follows, we reflect on what should be considered for recruitment and the establishment of research relationships; how to build familiarity and rapport; and the process of setting up the interview.

5.1 Recruitment and Establishing Relationships

Identifying and reaching out to participants requires due attention. The anonymous nature of telephone interviews means some level of knowledge about the study needs to be communicated to participants in advance of the interview.

As noted, engaging with trusted gatekeepers can be a useful way of identifying potential participants and they may seek consent to share contact details. They may also play a useful role in explaining the purpose and value of the research to potential participants and offer insights about meaningful engagement with participant groups.

When planning telephone interviews you might consider the following:

- Reach out to participants via a variety of avenues including gatekeepers, social media and snowballing. Participants often respond to researchers when they understand the project and/or are referred via relationships of trust,
- In initial interactions with participants, determine their preferences for interview, be responsive and do what you say will.
- Explain that the interviews will be conducted by telephone or consult with them about their preferred approach.

5.2 Familiarity and Rapport

As we note in section 2 of this toolkit, a key challenge with telephone interviews is that it can be more difficult to develop rapport when not co-present with a participant. This has resulted in concerns around response quality during interviews as well as the subsequent quality of data (Wilson et al 1998). Less attention has been paid to how rapport and relationship building might be achieved prior to interview and at a distance. Indeed, conducting telephone interviews at a distance does not have to mean that rapport is impossible to achieve. Instead, more creative approaches might be trialled and implemented.

It is important to seek to gain trust and establish rapport as early in the research process as possible. One way of doing this is to consider ways of making yourself more familiar to the participant ahead of the interview. The following suggestions are based on existing literature and our own experiences:

- Use available tools to ensure participants are adequately informed about the project and can give informed consent (see *Tales from the Field* box 5.1),

- Think about how to make your research study and the researcher(s) more visible - you could set up a Facebook page, for example, or a Youtube channel (see *Tales from the Field* box 5.1),
- Find context appropriate ways to share something about yourself with (potential) participants. This could make use of the social media channels mentioned above (also described in box 5.1 below). [Bridget Lockyer](#) (2021), who had no prior connection with her participants and utilised recruitment phone calls, sent letters with study information as well as a photo of herself so that participants did not receive an unexpected call from an unknown, faceless caller,
- Have conversations ahead of the interview, using whatever format the participant is comfortable with (e.g., text messages, Whatsapp, social media messaging, emails and introductory phone calls).

5.3 Setting up the interview

When setting up an interview(s) the following are important to consider:

- Think about accessibility and inclusivity; establish if the participant has any disabilities or health issues that may affect their ability to engage in a telephone interview. Do they need to take breaks or use specialist technology, for example?
- Once a participant has agreed to be interviewed, schedule the interview to take place shortly after e.g., within a few days to a week,
- Be flexible in terms of deciding an interview date/time with participants – provide options and ideally be prepared to offer interviews at flexible times including out of office hours. This was necessary for our team because the young men were balancing employment and childcare,
- Send reminders via text/e-mail/online messenger (depending on agreed communication methods) before the scheduled interview time,
- If possible, gather information about the participant ahead of the interview – e.g., informed consent, demographics survey – this will reduce burden on the participants' time on the day,
- Be willing to rearrange and conduct the interview at another time,
- Be persistent but know when to stop contacting if participants are not responding.

N.B. Interviews over the phone are just as emotionally intensive for participants as face-to-face interviews so if possible, offer something like a shopping voucher by way of a thank you. It is now also possible to send vouchers electronically or as a text message.

Box 5.1 *Tales from the Field*

The FYFF team thought carefully about how we increase the visibility of the research and how we might make ourselves as researchers more visible to a diverse audience. The study has a website and a Twitter presence, but we were conscious that these were being used for, and were more relevant to, academic audiences, practitioners and professionals. To engage more with participants, both prospective and actual, we decided to set up a Facebook page and Instagram and Youtube accounts. We have used these to introduce both the research and the research team. This involved posting introductions about each of us individually as well as sharing a few personal photographs to build familiarity and rapport. This was negotiated within the team with the option to opt out for those who felt uncomfortable doing so. Permissions for publicly sharing family images were also sought from family members.

6. Connectivity: conducting the telephone interview

As noted earlier, connectivity refers to how processes of maintaining participation and interaction might be impacted by ethical and practical issues associated with the digitally mediated forms of *connectivity* available. Guidance around connectivity issues when conducting telephone interviews is offered below that incorporates these considerations.

- Call at the agreed time and ideally send a text reminder just before. This enables the participant to (re)negotiate consent implicitly and also provides the researcher with some knowledge of participant intentions around participation.
- Call from a trusted, known number or a number agreed with the participant. Our participants were highly suspicious of withheld numbers or numbers unknown to them and did not answer our calls.
- Establish boundaries and any accommodations you may need to make for participants; consider - how long will the interview last? Would the participant like to take a comfort break during the interview? Are they expecting any interruptions? Make it clear that they are not required to disclose anything they do not want to, and they do not have to answer every question posed.
- Establish where the participant is and who they are with (space/privacy).
- Technology and recording: Decide what method of recording you are using and test it beforehand (examples given in section 4.3). Accept that there may be issues with technology such as a poor connection or dropped calls. It is useful to prepare by having backup plans. Try to be patient and respond as appropriate – in the worst cases, a telephone interview is much easier to reschedule than a face-to-face one because of their flexibility and ability to transcend geographical distance.

7. Connection: during the interview ... and beyond!

Earlier we highlighted the importance of building a connection with research participants before the interview. We now consider issues associated with digitally mediated forms of connectivity that involve maintaining good connections with participants.

- In face-to-face interviews researchers often respond to a variety of visual cues (e.g., smiling, nodding) to build relationships. The assumption is that the better the relationship of trust, the more insights the researcher is likely to glean, improving data quality. Consider what non-visual cues you can use to demonstrate active listening during the interview. Utterances like “yes” and “hmm” serve this purpose and you will probably do these instinctively anyway!
- Reassure your participant(s) about pauses and silences (from both parties!). In the case of the researcher, there will be times you need to check your questions, for example, or make notes, things your participant cannot see you doing. Explaining this early in the interview should alleviate any concerns over silences.
- Furthermore, it might be more difficult to gauge how your participant is feeling in the absence of seeing them. Take care in noting any indicators that they may be struggling with what is being discussed, for example, through changes in tone or expression. Offer breaks or change in focus as required.

- The interview may not be about the researcher but offering some personal insights can help to develop a connection with participants and help with familiarity (“Oh, you took GCSE Art? I nearly did too! How did you find that?...”).
- If you are conducting interviews as a part of a longer term qualitative longitudinal study there may be additional opportunities to establish and maintain connection. You might reflect on previous interviews and refer to specific details in subsequent interviews to demonstrate that ongoing connection and familiarity (e.g. “so your son’s had a birthday since our last chat hasn’t he?...”).

8. After the interview

After the interview you should build in time to take a break, reflect on the interview and make some fieldwork notes. We would advise conducting no more than two interviews in one day and think about spacing these out to allow time for reflection. A debrief with a colleague may be beneficial if the interview addressed issues of a sensitive nature or was emotionally intense. Care around the ethical responsibility to preserve confidentiality and privacy should be considered if not discussing the issue with a family member, colleague or close friend rather than a research team member. You will also need to follow up with the research participant(s) if they were told this would be the case. This kind of debrief can be done via text message, e-mail or other online platform.

9. Building in creative and/or participatory methods

Using creative and/or participatory methods may be a little trickier to conduct during telephone interviews but there are some innovative ways to incorporate such approaches alongside them. One thing to bear in mind is that participants may need to commit more resources themselves to participate in methods like this. As with any research decision, the use of creative/participatory methods alongside telephone interviews needs to be considered reflexively in the context of the research at hand and with ethical questions around participant burdens in mind. If they do agree to participate in these ways, consider what resource the project can afford, rethink what you are offering by way of a ‘thank you’ for their participation and take into consideration their additional time/efforts.

The baseline study for FYFF ([Following Young Fathers](#)) utilised pen portraits, timelines and relationship mapping as ‘tools to think with’ (Hanna & Lau-Clayton, 2012) alongside face-to-face interviews with young dads. With some thought, such methods could be incorporated just as effectively alongside telephone interviews. Templates for participatory activities could be posted out to participants ahead of their interview and there are different ways these can be used. Participants might do these ahead of the interview, or indeed during, and reflect on them with prompting from the researcher. Questioning by the researcher might be limited by not being co-present, restricting the researchers’ view of the visual tools being created by the participant. Researchers should think creatively about this in advance and might ask participants to take and send photos of their finished activities prior to the interview.

Sending materials out by post to research participants can be a way of retaining creative, participatory methods at a distance and alongside telephone interview methods. This also reduces cost burdens on participants.

Notable examples of how researchers have conducted research creatively at a distance are provided below and we encourage consideration of their use as a complement to telephone interviews:

- Ptolomey and Nelson (2020) facilitated zine-making as a research tool in the context of Covid-19. They used 'engagement boxes', which were posted out to research participants and contained zine-making materials along with gestures of hospitality (e.g. some biscuits or tea bags). Zine-making workshops were then held online/virtually. Participants had their materials ready as well as something to have on their breaks to help in creating that sense of togetherness in the absence of a physical shared space. Such an approach could also be utilised alongside telephone interviewing albeit as a prompt for discussion with the researcher.
- In the CHEER project ('Children researching their everyday lives, education & relationships during the coronavirus pandemic'), Lomax and Smith (2020) used creative, participatory methods with children at a distance. They sent out activity sheets and templates and produced videos for explanation.

Box 9 *Tales from the Field*

Recently, we have been designing a 'photovoice' task that we intend to conduct alongside telephone interviews with young fathers and their children. The participants were already known to us (having participated in the first wave of interviews for this qualitative longitudinal study). Our prior insights with this cohort of young men have informed our planning around the incorporation of photovoice with their specific circumstances in mind. We know that they all have access to the internet and appropriate levels of digital literacy. We will therefore ask them to send their photos to us electronically and prior to the follow-up telephone interview. Having some flexibility with the study funding as well as the involvement of project partners who worked directly with these dads also means we are in a position to provide digital cameras if participants do not have access to the technology required.

9.1 In/exclusion and Accessibility

In thinking about using creative and/or participatory methods alongside telephone interviewing it is important to consider inclusion and accessibility for participants. Is there potential for participants to be excluded by these methods e.g. if a smartphone is required do they have access to one? If internet is required, do they have access to Wifi or can mobile data be provided? Where you are considering posting out materials, do you have the necessary addresses required? Do any of your participants have disabilities or learning difficulties that may prevent them from engaging or might require the method to be adapted?

10. Concluding thoughts

The policy of enforced social and physical distancing because of lockdown has caused many social researchers to turn to alternative, digital forms of research [additional reading and resources for conducting alternatives to face-to-face interviewing can be found [here](#)]. Far from an inferior method of conducting qualitative interviews, we have been able to establish new and ongoing relationships with participants, maintain existing relationships and produce data of comparable quality to that which we produced prior to the pandemic. We have also been pushed to think 'outside the box' and to consult with participants in ways that have enabled us to be more creative about our approaches, albeit guided by key methodological principles. We have created videos and digital content and have used platforms for research that we had no intention of using prior to the pandemic. Telephone interviews are not without their challenges, but neither are face-to-face interviews. As part of a much broader repertoire of qualitative methods, this guide illustrates the strengths of this method, some of its challenges, and provides some worked examples of how they can be conducted both effectively and inclusively, including alongside other methods and with a marginalised participant group.

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