

Using text-based vignettes in qualitative social work research

Katrin Bain, London Metropolitan University

Abstract (250 words)

Text-based vignettes are widely used within qualitative social work research yet there is little guidance on how to construct and integrate them into the research process. This article discusses the uses, benefits, and limitations of written vignettes as part of semi-structured interviews and focus groups with social workers and related professionals. It provides clear guidelines on how to design a vignette. This includes the choice of scenario, characteristics of the protagonist, type of vignette, research setting, length, vignettes in semi-structured interviews and pre-testing. Text-based vignettes have been successfully used in social work research on six continents in a variety of research contexts including single context, comparative, cross-sectional, longitudinal and replication studies. Written vignettes are a useful tool to elicit (professional) values, attitudes, and decision-making processes in a time efficient manner that produces focused, in-depth knowledge without the need to use real practice examples that could potentially include sensitive data or breach confidentiality. Vignettes have been used to explore a wide range of topics including but not limited to adult safeguarding, care planning, child protection and multi-agency working together. There is some debate whether vignette responses mirror real life actions. The value of vignette data goes beyond documenting real-world decision making. It can uncover tacit social work knowledge and unquestioned beliefs to show how they interplay in decision making.

Keywords: vignette, semi-structured interview, qualitative research, social work, focus group

Introduction

Written vignettes are short case scenarios that are given to research participants to comment on. They are a useful tool to elicit (professional) values, attitudes, and decision-making processes, especially when used as part of qualitative, semi-structured interviews or focus groups. They are part of the interview schedule and therefore integrated into the wider research design including theoretical framework, ethical process and method of analysis that is chosen for the qualitative research project. Despite their popularity within social work research, it is rare for articles to include the full vignette and a detailed description of how it was constructed, leaving novice researchers with little guidance on using vignettes within the research process. This article fills the gap by providing an easily accessible article for students and researchers new to vignette research on how to design effective text-based vignettes and use them as part of qualitative, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with social workers and related professionals. Its main focus is on expert interviews (Meuser and Nagel, 2009) with professionals within their institutional context.

A large body of social work research is concerned with gathering insights from professionals on their practice, organisational setting, policy implementation, decision making processes and (professional) values and attitudes. Qualitative semi-structured interviews with individuals and focus groups with several participants are commonly used to get in-depth insights on the topic (Bryman, 2016). Social workers and other professionals that are interviewed in these contexts 'are of less interest as (whole) persons than as experts in a certain field of activity. They are integrated into the study not as a single case but as representing a group' (Flick, 2023: 221). They are also often time pressured. Therefore a

topic guide is used to focus the interviews in line with the research questions whilst still enabling participants to identify and discuss issues of relevance that the researcher may not have considered or anticipated (Meuser and Nagel, 2009: 474). This supports the aim of qualitative research to generate rich, contextualised data. The challenge with a solely question-based topic guide is that not all participants might talk at length in response to the initial question, making it difficult for the researcher to use the response to either ask follow-on questions or lead into the next topic area. This can lead to a question / short answer back-and-forth that is difficult for the interviewer to break, risks losing the participants' interest and jeopardises the richness of data required for qualitative research. Within social work research this risk is exacerbated by the need for confidentiality that prevents participants from talking about real-life practice situations and by participants potentially offering socially wanted or expected responses to questions about values, attitudes and sensitive topics that are not a reflection of real-life actions. A key challenge of expert interviews is 'how can we get methodologically controlled access to subjective experiences in a limited time, with a specific focus, without taking the whole person or life history into account?' (Flick, 2023: 224). Vignettes can be a useful tool for this and mitigate some of the pitfalls of semi-structured interviews. 'The vignette essentially is a very short story that, when carefully constructed and pretested, simulates real life experiences' (Schoenberg and Ravdal, 2000: 63–64). Participants respond to a scenario whose characteristics are controlled by the researcher creating forced inference which is especially powerful if combined with reasoning and justification of the response to the vignette (Schnurr, 2003: 397). Text-based vignettes within semi-structured interviews and focus groups with social workers and related professionals have been successfully used in

- Europe (Åkerlind et al., 2019; Callegari et al., 2022; Enroos et al., 2017; Falconer and Shardlow, 2018; Ghanem et al., 2018; Grootegoed and Smith, 2018; Hetherington, 1998; Isham et al., 2021; Käkälä, 2020; Kristensen, 2011; Liljegren, 2012; Nygren et al., 2021; Sanfelici, 2021; Walsh et al., 2019),
- North America (Aujla, 2020; Schoenberg and Ravdal, 2000; Taylor et al., 2021),
- Latin America (Nygren and Olstedal, 2015),
- Africa (Nygren and Olstedal, 2015),
- Asia (Taylor et al., 2021) and
- Australia (Darlington et al., 2010; Drury-Hudson, 1999)

to explore a wide range of topics including but not limited to

- adult safeguarding (Graham et al., 2017; Stevens et al., 2010, 2020),
- care planning (Fargas-Malet and McSherry, 2020; McCafferty et al., 2021; McCafferty and Taylor, 2022; Zeijlmans et al., 2019),
- child protection (Drury-Hudson, 1999; McCafferty and Taylor, 2022) and
- multi-agency working together (Engwall et al., 2019; Roets et al., 2016).

The next section considers seven aspects of vignette design.

Designing a text-based vignette

A written vignette is a tool used as part of semi-structured interviews and focus groups to generate data that is useful to answer the research question(s). The following vignette was used by Bain in an international comparative study (2008) and a replication study (2020) to explore how parents who are involved with Children's Services are represented by social workers and how these

representations relate to conceptions of citizenship found on the organisational and national policy levels:

You receive a referral on the Miller family. The three children - Marie 6, Hannah 2, and Michael 8 months - live with their father and mother. The health visitor is concerned that the parents are not looking after the children properly. The children often wear dirty clothes and standards of hygiene in the home are very poor. Neighbours have reported that Marie and Hannah are playing unsupervised in the street, sometimes until late in the evening. Marie's primary school teacher is also worried. She says that Marie always seems to be tired, has problems concentrating and comes to school without a lunchbox. The teacher's anxiety has increased recently because Marie has said that her parents leave all three children at home when they go shopping. (Bain, 2008: 99, 2020: 8)

This vignette is used here to illustrate the decisions that go into the construction of a vignette. Other examples of text-based vignettes can be found in Callegari (2022), Darlington et al. (2010) Enroos (2017), Isham et al. (2021), Nygren and Oltedal (2010), Schoenberg and Ravidal (2000), Stevens et al. (2010). As a short, constructed scenario a vignette cannot include a full representation of reality. It therefore needs to be carefully designed to include enough information for the participants to respond to without being too lengthy or complex.

A) Choice of Scenario

Vignettes in expert interviews are usually constructed to mirror the research participants' practice and to be recognised by the participants as a 'typical' scenario that they could encounter in their work (Callegari et al., 2022: 6). The aim is to construct a complex but not unusual scenario, otherwise there is a risk that the participants discuss how unusual or unrealistic the vignette is rather than focussing on their response to it (Nygren and Oltedal, 2015). To get deep insights 'the best decision should not be apparent' (Zeijlmans et al., 2019: 402; see also Stevens et al., 2010: 294) and the scenario should 'include uncertainties in order to promote discussion and potentially different interpretations from the participants.' (Falconer and Shardlow, 2018: 117; see also Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014).

Bain's vignette took the form of a referral received by a social worker of child neglect. The degree of neglect remains unclear due to the use of words that are open to interpretation like 'dirty clothes', 'not ... properly' and 'very poor' home conditions. The vignette is intentionally constructed vaguely enough so that social workers must decide whether the statutory child protection threshold is met or whether preventative support could be offered. This ambiguity yields more variety in responses than a clear child abuse case where the facts are not open to interpretation. Wilkins (2015) achieves the same ambiguity by including an equal number of risk and protective factors in the vignette.

The vignette scenario can be generated in different ways. It can be based on literature (Schoenberg and Ravidal, 2000), interviews with people with lived experience (Pwle) (Isham et al., 2021; Roets et al., 2016) or professionals (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014), analysis of case records (Engwall et al., 2019; Kristensen, 2011; Stevens et al., 2010) or serious case reviews (Wilkins, 2015), media reported incidents (Aujla, 2020), practice knowledge (Bain, 2008) or a combination of these. Zeijlmans et al. (2019: 402), for example, observed professionals in two organisations and analysed case files from a third organisation. They supplemented insights from both with literature-based variables that determine child placement outcomes to construct the vignette. It is also possible to co-create

vignettes with Pwle's. Often vignettes describe the situation and leave it up to the interview participants to freely develop their position. Alternatively, pre-set options can be built into the vignette. Sanfelici (2021) developed a vignette to research diversity and equality in social work that was set during a social work team meeting where three social workers discussed a family and presented different views (ethnocentrism, ethnorelative and universalistic). The interview participants were asked to comment on these possible positions. Similarly McCafferty et al. (2021) and McCafferty and Taylor (2022) gave social workers in the interview a realistic vignette of a 5 year old girl for whom a permanency decision regarding her care/upbringing needed to be made that included potential options - all of which have advantages and disadvantages and the social workers were asked which one they would choose and why.

The language of the vignette should be appropriate for the participants and topic and easy to understand. The choice of words can change or influence the response. The vignette should not only help answer the research question but should also be interesting and relevant to the interview participants.

B) Characteristics of the protagonist

Characteristics that are included in the vignette like names, age, gender, occupation etc. have the potential to steer the responses. They need to be chosen intentionally to support the research. It is not possible to include all dimensions (Nygren et al., 2021: 2121).

The role of parents in Children's Services was the focus of Bain's research. To avoid a gendered perception, the children live with both parents and the vignette gives no clues about marriage problems, domestic violence, social background, or labour market participation. This allows social workers to fill the gaps and in one application of the vignette unearthed a very gendered understanding of parental roles (Bain, 2008). The children's ages were chosen to cover the age range from baby to primary school to ensure a wider range of professional involvement and so that none of the children is old enough to take on care responsibilities. The names were chosen to be common names both in England and Germany where the vignette was administered. Similarly Aujla (2020: 3) in researching 'honour'-based violence and forced marriage chose Nina as an ethnically neutral name: 'I left out race, ethnicity, and social class markers, and I carefully selected the protagonist's name to see whether participants would fill in details like race and ethnicity.' Nina is 17 years old as a lot of the honour-based abuse happens around that age, and female, as more females than males are impacted.

Other researchers have developed variations of one vignette to vary key characteristics. Callegari et al. (2022) developed four versions of one vignette. In one version the character was working age and in the other an older client. For both a female and male version was prepared. Harris et al. (2022) used two versions of a vignette in interviews with social workers that were identical, except in one version the person had dementia and in the other was a drug addict. Wilkins (2015) had a computer programme allocate ethnicity, gender, age of the children and some family characteristics at random but keeping to the ratio for each characteristic that reflects the proportion in serious case reviews. Taylor et al. (2021) used one vignette but asked follow-up questions where characteristics like age and gender were changed. Nygren et al.'s (2021) research found that social workers focus on the mother in their response suggesting a gendered response. In the vignette the mother contacts the social worker and reports that the husband is violent. It is possible that the findings are influenced by how the vignette is constructed.

C) Type of vignette

The type of vignette determines how much information is given to the participants, and when. Bain's vignette is a snapshot vignette where all the information is given to the participant in the beginning (see also Aujla, 2020; Jenkins et al., 2010). An alternative are developmental vignettes, where the information is given to participants in several stages (Grootegoed and Smith, 2018; Hetherington, 1998; Kristensen, 2011; Nygren et al., 2021; Walsh et al., 2019). Developmental vignettes give an insight into how additional information influences professional decision-making. Often the development is a worsening or escalation of the situation, but other developments are possible. Nygren and Oltedal's (2015) developmental vignette follows a young person from ages 14-20 showing the different mental phases and developing maturity. After the initial response to a vignette Ghanem et al. (2018) added a scientific study about a drug-like substance that the person in vignette is taking to see how participants would deal with scientific knowledge. Developmental vignettes can either be static, where the vignette develops in stages irrespective of participants' responses or interactive, where alternative stages are prepared and presented according to the responses to earlier stages. Interactivity can for example be achieved through linked Powerpoint slides (Jenkins et al., 2010). In developmental vignettes plausibility is very important. If the vignette development contradicts what the participant said earlier, it can provoke negative emotions or reactions (Jenkins et al., 2010). It is unlikely that plausibility can be achieved for all participants, therefore the researcher needs to actively manage the process by addressing it at the beginning of the interview and assuring the participant that differences are wanted within the research process.

D) Research Setting

Vignettes are suitable for research in a single (organisational) context. Given that vignettes provide constant stimuli across all interviews or focus groups (Soydan, 1996), vignette interviews are ideal for comparative, longitudinal and replication studies where the analysis of the responses to the vignette allows for an understanding of how contextual factors impact decision making and whether responses change over time. Within longitudinal research the same participants are given the same vignette at different points in time and the responses are compared. Jenkins et al. (2010) consider vignettes effective longitudinal research instruments, however there is the chance that participants adapt their responses based on experiences of the first interview, especially in multi-stage vignettes when they know how the vignette develops. In replication studies the vignette is used at a different time, with different people either in the same or a different organisational context (Bain, 2020). Vignettes offer potential for a wide range of comparative research. Comparisons can be made between groups, for example Pwles and professionals (Stevens et al., 2010) or students and professionals (Ghanem et al., 2018). Vignettes can also be used across services as a useful way to explore the values and processes underlying decision-making in multidisciplinary teams by 'eliciting complex understanding across different groups' (Darlington et al., 2010: 358). In international comparative research use of vignettes minimises the possibility of cultural misunderstandings.

The use of vignettes sheds light on the interrelation of different levels, decision-making processes, possible interventions and responsibilities and the limits of social work (Schnurr, 2005: 151). This reduces the risk of misinterpretation of the data because of the researcher's own background. Thus, vignettes allow a researcher to be sensitive to both the context and the content of the data. The vignette needs to be relevant for all contexts that it is applied to (Nygren et al., 2021). This is especially important for international comparative research but also when interviewing different groups of people. Small tweaks might be necessary to ensure relevance and comparability. Bain's vignette was used with German and English social workers. In both countries one of the professionals

who raises the concerns is the medical professional responsible for small children. In England this is the health visitor whereas in Germany it is a paediatrician. The vignette exchanged health visitor for paediatrician in the German version and therefore ensured that the report comes in both countries from the health professional most likely to be in contact with the baby. Hetherington (1998) added another step for comparison. First, the vignette was presented to social workers in a focus groups setting, and they were asked to respond to it. In a second meeting the same group of social workers received the vignette responses from a group in another country and was asked to respond to their response. This gave additional insights and triangulated the results.

E) Length

Vignettes are always incomplete, but this is not unlike social work practice. Social workers are often in a position where they need to make decisions based on incomplete information (Hughes and Huby, 2004; Zeijlmans et al., 2019), for example when they receive a referral for a new family as in the above vignette (see also Falconer and Shardlow, 2018). How participants fill the gaps can offer interesting insights into professional thinking. Through the professional view on it vignettes become complete (Schnurr, 2003). Even when participants initially decline to comment due to the lack of information the researcher can ask what information they would need and therefore get an insight into what influences decision making (Schnurr, 2003).

Vignette lengths vary widely. Bain's vignette is 131 words long and Aujla's (2020) 264 words long. Zeijlman's et al. (2019) developed two types of snapshot vignettes to explore foster care matching practice – three vignettes of children needing foster care and five of foster carers – and presented them as two-page stories including examples of child behaviour and specific wishes by foster parents. For developmental vignettes the number of stages influences the length. Short vignettes that include the necessary information in a concise manner allow participants to quicker process and respond to it. Using long vignettes or several vignettes can tire the participant and lead to superficial answers (Hughes and Huby, 2004). Participants should be provided with a printout of the vignette to refer to and make notes on.

The length of the vignette should be considered when deciding when participants receive the vignette. Short vignettes can be presented during the interview and developmental vignettes need to be introduced during the interview (Bain, 2008, 2020; Engwall et al., 2019). Longer snapshot vignettes can be shared with participants before the interview. Aujla (2020) e-mailed participants the vignette one day before the interview to give them enough time to read it but limit the opportunities for participants to discuss it with others. Zeijlmans et al. (2019) first conducted a semi-structured interview on matching practice. At the end of this the participants received the vignettes of the foster families and were asked to read them before the 2nd meeting. The second interview with the vignettes took place a month later. Participants were first asked what they found interesting in the vignette to ensure information is fresh. Child vignettes were presented one by one during the 2nd interview and time was allowed to read them and make notes.

F) Vignettes in semi-structured interviews

Vignettes can be the sole focus of the interview or integrated as one part of the topic guide either at the beginning of the interview (Åkerlind et al., 2019; Bain, 2008, 2020; Callegari et al., 2022; Darlington et al., 2010; McCafferty et al., 2021; Sanfelici, 2021) or later in the interview (Enroos et al., 2017; Fargas-Malet and McSherry, 2020; Käkälä, 2020). When administering the vignette the participants need to be clear from whose perspective they should answer it: 'There are a number of

ways that participants may respond: (1) from the viewpoint of the vignette characters; (2) people more generally; or (3) the participant's own viewpoint.' (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014: 437). Asking participants to reply as a character from within the vignette might minimise the desire of the participant to answer in a socially acceptable manner. However, '[i]f situations presented in vignettes appear hypothetical rather than realistic then responses may be answered in a similar, hypothetical fashion. This can be a problem as realistic responses are required.' (Hughes and Huby, 2004: 40–41). Even when responding to a vignette as oneself 'the hypothetical nature of the situation would be beneficial, as it distances the participants from the subject under study and reduces social desirability towards the researcher' (Ghanem et al., 2018: 7; see also Wilks, 2004: 82).

Once the participants have read and considered the vignette they are invited to 'think aloud' (McCafferty et al., 2021; McCafferty and Taylor, 2022), to talk through their thoughts, responses and justifications of decisions. An open, initial question invites the participants to talk by asking them what they would do (Roets et al., 2016) or what they are thinking (Ghanem et al., 2018). Examples are:

- 'What comes to your mind when you read about this family?' (Bain, 2008: 81, 2020)
- 'What action would you take?' (Bain, 2008: 81, 2020)
- 'How would you work with the family?' (Bain, 2008: 81, 2020)
- 'Please tell me how you would typically proceed in this case?' (Enroos et al., 2017: 10)
- 'Tell me your first steps in managing this case?' (Taylor et al., 2021: 3)
- 'Describe your initial thoughts about what is happening in the scenario' (Aujla, 2020: 4)
- 'How would you reason in this case?' (Engwall et al., 2019: 1028)
- 'What do you need to find out to judge what support is needed?' (Engwall et al., 2019: 1028)

The opening questions start the conversation and ideally the participant's narrative will then cover all aspects of the research with minimal prompts. Open-ended questions invite long, detailed responses, especially when participants are given space and the researcher is listening and comfortable with silence to only interject once the participant has stopped talking. It is advisable to make notes of interesting points that might need further elaboration rather than interrupting the participant's response. In addition, a list of potential prompt questions covering different aspects of the vignette is helpful to have. These could include:

- 'What else would you want to know [regarding this case]?' (Taylor et al., 2021: 3)
- 'How would the MDT [multi-disciplinary team] manage this case?' (Taylor et al., 2021: 3)
- 'What parts of the vignette stood out to you, and why?' (Aujla, 2020: 4)
- 'What experiences or situations have you heard of that are similar to the one presented in the scenario? If so, tell me more about them.' (Aujla, 2020: 4)
- 'What else concerns you about this scenario? Any other comments?' (Aujla, 2020: 4)
- 'Can you give me an example?' (Bain, 2008: 395)
- 'Can you tell me more about this?' (Bain, 2008: 395)

Nygren and Oltedal (2015) asked social workers what recommendations they would give to an 'ideal type' social worker in the vignette situation to capture general values and judgements that are typical for the participants work context.

G) Pre-testing the vignette

Before conducting vignette interviews and focus groups both the vignette and full interview needs to be pre-tested (Wilks, 2004). These pilot interviews are common in research (Callegari et al., 2022; Grootegoed and Smith, 2018) but process and extent varies. McCafferty and Taylor (2022) and Bain (2008) conducted two pilot interviews with practitioners. Stevens et al. (2010) used an advisory group to pre-test the vignette and Schoenberg and Ravdal (2000) used both Pwle's and service providers. Zeijlmans et al. (2019) used a multi-stage process including discussion with research group, colleagues who are not involved in the study, a university Think Tank and pilot interview with two practitioners. It is important to pre-test until the vignette and questions are proven to be suitable for the research and no further changes are necessary.

Benefits and limitations of vignettes

This article has shown that

A vignette is a brief text representing a constructed case, usually a scenario of a person in a specific situation, that includes information about events [...]. It is presented to an interviewee who is asked to judge the situation, propose an appropriate way of handling it, and (if necessary) justify the choices made (Schnurr et al., 2001: 10).

It aims to 'evoke tacit knowledge, instead of collecting abstract or general opinions' (Sanfelici, 2021: 269). Responses to vignettes give insights into people's norms and beliefs whilst taking into account contextual factors (Grootegoed and Smith, 2018). Vignettes allow an insight into social work practice, decision making and service user experiences without the need for examples from social workers' practice that would potentially include sensitive data or breach confidentiality (Isham et al., 2021: 3196). Vignettes can be used to address sensitive topics that are otherwise difficult to talk about (Grootegoed and Smith, 2018; Wilks, 2004).

While there is agreement that vignettes produce rich data there is less agreement what conclusions can be drawn from the data. Views vary especially in whether responses to vignettes predict behaviour in real-life practice. According to Soydan (1996: 121–122) vignette responses correlate with real-life actions:

Vignettes present real-life contexts which give the respondents a feeling that meanings are social and situational. They are, therefore, less likely to express beliefs and values in abstract contexts than traditional techniques. Accordingly, their capacity to approximate real-life decision-making situations is extensive. (Soydan, 1996, 121-122).

Jenkins (2010: 192) agrees albeit slightly more cautiously:

how participants seek to make sense of vignette situations are not entirely distinct from how they may seek to make sense of everyday lived events. As such, an interviewee's response to a vignette may well carry some predictive power in respect of how they would behave if they were subsequently presented with a similar "real-life" event. (Jenkins et al., 2010: 192)

Engwall et al. (2019), Falconer and Shardlow (2018), Wilkins (2015) and Wilks (2004) argue that there is no guarantee that vignettes can reveal what participants would do in everyday practice.

The value of vignette data goes beyond documenting real world decision making. Vignette data can show ‘unquestioned beliefs which interviewees hold regarding their reality of their life worlds’ (Jenkins et al., 2010: 192) and assess the knowledge underlying social work expertise (Ghanem et al., 2018). Qualitative approaches can go beyond behaviour and show richness in ‘ambiguity, emotional struggle and interplay of ethical and extra-ethical factors associated with dilemmas in social work’ (Wilks, 2004: 83). Vignette research can contribute to theoretical generalisation and help to theorise social work actions in different welfare systems (Nygren and Oltedal, 2015). A benefit of vignettes is that everyone receives the same information (Engwall et al., 2019) which is helpful in comparing individual responses to the same scenario (Wilkins, 2015), comparing results of different studies (Wilks, 2004) and explaining social workers’ views and decision-making intentions from a cross-national perspective (Falconer and Shardlow, 2018). Well-documented vignette research can open the door for more replication studies which currently are rare in social work. Text-based vignettes are a tool in qualitative research that allows researchers, including novice researchers, to gain ‘insight into the social components of the participant’s interpretative framework and perceptual processes.’ (Jenkins et al., 2010: 178). They are particularly helpful as part of semi-structured interviews and focus groups with social workers and related professionals.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- Åkerlind C, Martin L and Gustafsson C (2019) Care managers’ perceptions of eHomecare: a qualitative interview study. *European Journal of Social Work* 22(4). Routledge: 634–646. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2017.1366893.
- Aujla W (2020) Using a Vignette in Qualitative Research to Explore Police Perspectives of a Sensitive Topic: “Honor”-Based Crimes and Forced Marriages. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 19. SAGE Publications Inc: 1609406919898352. DOI: 10.1177/1609406919898352.
- Bain K (2008) *New public management, citizenship and social work: children’s services in Germany and England*. phd. University of Warwick. Available at: <http://webcat.warwick.ac.uk/record=b2334129~S15> (accessed 22 December 2022).
- Bain K (2020) *Parents as Service Users of Children’s Services in England- Research Report*.
- Bradbury-Jones C, Taylor J and Herber OR (2014) Vignette development and administration: a framework for protecting research participants. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 17(4). Routledge: 427–440. DOI: 10.1080/13645579.2012.750833.
- Bryman A (2016) *Social Research Methods*. 5th ed. London: Oxford University Press.
- Callegari J, Liedgren P and Kullberg C (2022) Between self-determination and advice: Sense-making and justifications in Swedish budget and debt counselling. *The British Journal of Social Work: bcac162*. DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bcac162.

- Darlington Y, Healy K and Feeney JA (2010) Approaches to assessment and intervention across four types of child and family welfare services. *Children and Youth Services Review* 32(3): 356–364. DOI: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2009.10.005.
- Drury-Hudson J (1999) Decision making in Child Protection: The Use of Theoretical, Empirical and Procedural Knowledge by Novices and Experts and Implications for Fieldwork Placement. *The British Journal of Social Work* 29(1): 147–169. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordjournals.bjsw.a011423.
- Engwall K, Östberg F, Andersson G, et al. (2019) Children with disabilities in Swedish child welfare – a differentiating and disabling practice. *European Journal of Social Work* 22(6). Routledge: 1025–1037. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2018.1461073.
- Enroos R, Stein Helland H, Pösö T, et al. (2017) The role and function of the spokesperson in care order proceedings: A cross-country study in Finland and Norway. *Children and Youth Services Review* 74: 8–16. DOI: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.01.017.
- Falconer R and Shardlow SM (2018) Comparing child protection decision-making in England and Finland: supervised or supported judgement? *Journal of Social Work Practice* 32(2). Routledge: 111–124. DOI: 10.1080/02650533.2018.1438996.
- Fargas-Malet M and McSherry D (2020) Regional variations in care planning in Northern Ireland: Proposing an ecological model of decision-making. *Qualitative Social Work* 19(2). SAGE Publications: 229–245. DOI: 10.1177/1473325018811474.
- Flick U (2023) *Introduction to Qualitative Research*. 7th ed. Los Angeles, London: SAGE.
- Ghanem C, Kollar I, Fischer F, et al. (2018) How do social work novices and experts solve professional problems? A micro-analysis of epistemic activities and the use of evidence. *European Journal of Social Work* 21(1). Routledge: 3–19. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2016.1255931.
- Graham K, Stevens M, Norrie C, et al. (2017) Models of safeguarding in England: Identifying important models and variables influencing the operation of adult safeguarding. *Journal of Social Work* 17(3). SAGE Publications: 255–276. DOI: 10.1177/1468017316640071.
- Grootegeod E and Smith M (2018) The Emotional Labour of Austerity: How Social Workers Reflect and Work on Their Feelings towards Reducing Support to Needy Children and Families. *The British Journal of Social Work* 48(7): 1929–1947. DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bcx151.
- Harris J, Martineau S, Manthorpe J, et al. (2022) Social work practice with self-neglect and homelessness: Findings from vignette-based interviews. *The British Journal of Social Work*: bcac180. DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bcac180.
- Hetherington R (1998) Issues in European child protection research. *European Journal of Social Work* 1(1). Routledge: 71–82. DOI: 10.1080/13691459808414724.
- Hughes R and Huby M (2004) The construction and interpretation of vignettes in social research. *Social Work and Social Sciences Review* 11(1). 1: 36–51. DOI: 10.1921/swsr.v11i1.428.
- Isham L, Bradbury-Jones C and Hewison A (2021) ‘This is Still All about Love’: Practitioners’ Perspectives of Working with Family Carers Affected by the Harmful Behaviour of the Older Person for Whom They Care. *The British Journal of Social Work* 51(8): 3190–3208. DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bcaa129.

- Jenkins N, Bloor M, Fischer J, et al. (2010) Putting it in context: the use of vignettes in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Research* 10(2). SAGE Publications: 175–198. DOI: 10.1177/1468794109356737.
- Käkelä E (2020) Narratives of power and powerlessness: cultural competence in social work with asylum seekers and refugees. *European Journal of Social Work* 23(3). Routledge: 425–436. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2019.1693337.
- Kristensen OS (2011) The institutional set-up: an analysis of social pedagogues' accounts of treatment in everyday practice. *European Journal of Social Work* 14(2). Routledge: 229–245. DOI: 10.1080/13691451003744374.
- Liljegren A (2012) Pragmatic professionalism: micro-level discourse in social work. *European Journal of Social Work* 15(3). Routledge: 295–312. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2010.543888.
- McCafferty P and Taylor BJ (2022) Barriers to knowledge acquisition and utilisation in child welfare decisions: A qualitative study. *Journal of Social Work* 22(1). SAGE Publications: 87–108. DOI: 10.1177/1468017320978917.
- McCafferty P, Duffy J and Hayes D (2021) Permanency Decisions in Child Welfare: A Qualitative Study. *The British Journal of Social Work* 51(6): 2134–2154. DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bcab095.
- Meuser M and Nagel U (2009) Das Experteninterview — konzeptionelle Grundlagen und methodische Anlage. In: Pickel S, Pickel G, Lauth H-J, et al. (eds) *Methoden der vergleichenden Politik- und Sozialwissenschaft: Neue Entwicklungen und Anwendungen*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, pp. 465–479. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-531-91826-6_23.
- Nygren K, Walsh JC, Ellingsen IT, et al. (2021) Gender, Parenting and Practices in Child Welfare Social Work? A Comparative Study from England, Ireland, Norway and Sweden. *The British Journal of Social Work* 51(6): 2116–2133. DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bcaa085.
- Nygren L and Oltedal S (2015) Constructing a vignette for qualitative comparative family research. *Journal of Comparative Social Work* 10(1). 1: 1–14. DOI: 10.31265/jcsw.v10i1.123.
- Roets G, Roose R, Schiettecat T, et al. (2016) Reconstructing the Foundations of Joined-Up Working: From Organisational Reform towards a Joint Engagement of Child and Family Services. *The British Journal of Social Work* 46(2): 306–322. DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bcu121.
- Sanfelici M (2021) Diversity and equality in social work: a qualitative study in Italy. *European Journal of Social Work* 24(2). Routledge: 267–277. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2019.1646215.
- Schnurr S (2003) Vignetten in quantitativen und qualitativen Forschungsdesigns. In: Otto H-U, Oelerich G, and Micheel H-G (eds) *Empirische Forschung. Sozialarbeit - Sozialpädagogik - Soziale Probleme*. München-Unterschleissheim: Luchterhand, pp. 393–400.
- Schnurr S (2005) Internationale und International vergleichende Forschung. In: Schweppe C and Thole W (eds) *Sozialpädagogik Als Forschende Disziplin*. Weinheim, München: Juventa, pp. 143–160.

- Schnurr S, Otto H-U and Horn W (2001) Examining the effects of New Public Management on personal public services - the use of case vignettes in qualitative research interviews. In: *The Fifth International Research Symposium on Public Management*, Barcelona, 2001.
- Schoenberg NE and Ravdal H (2000) Using vignettes in awareness and attitudinal research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 3(1). Routledge: 63–74. DOI: 10.1080/136455700294932.
- Soydan H (1996) Using the vignette method in cross-cultural comparisons. In: Hantrais L and Mangen S (eds) *Cross-National Research Methods in the Social Sciences*. London: Pinter, pp. 120–128.
- Stevens M, Manthorpe J, Martineau S, et al. (2010) Making Decisions about Who Should Be Barred from Working with Adults in Vulnerable Situations: The Need for Social Work Understanding. *The British Journal of Social Work* 40(1): 290–310. DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bcn135.
- Stevens M, Manthorpe J, Martineau S, et al. (2020) Practice perspectives and theoretical debates about social workers' legal powers to protect adults. *Journal of Social Work* 20(1). SAGE Publications: 3–22. DOI: 10.1177/1468017318794275.
- Taylor EK, Tener D, Silovsky JF, et al. (2021) Comparison of children's advocacy center responses to harmful sexual behavior among siblings: An international perspective. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 122: 105371. DOI: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105371.
- Walsh J, White S, Morris K, et al. (2019) How do you solve a problem like Maria? Family complexity and institutional complications in UK social work. *European Journal of Social Work* 22(6). Routledge: 1050–1061. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2018.1461068.
- Wilkins D (2015) Balancing Risk and Protective Factors: How Do Social Workers and Social Work Managers Analyse Referrals that May Indicate Children Are at Risk of Significant Harm. *The British Journal of Social Work* 45(1): 395–411. DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bct114.
- Wilks T (2004) The Use of Vignettes in Qualitative Research into Social Work Values. *Qualitative Social Work* 3(1). SAGE Publications: 78–87. DOI: 10.1177/1473325004041133.
- Zeijlmans K, López López M, Grietens H, et al. (2019) Heuristic decision-making in foster care matching: Evidence from a think-aloud study. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 88: 400–411. DOI: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.12.007.