Outputs from 4th ESRC FOOD Seminar – Group 2

Background

This document contains the write up of the discussion during the 4th ESRC FOOD seminar, held in Banbury on the 21st January 2016. It covers group 2, which discussed a) research methods and b) types of intervention. It was also meant to cover evaluation and monitoring of evaluations, but this was not discussed due to a lack of time. The group was facilitated by Tom Quested and the scribe was Rebecca White.

Research methods

General comments

1. Methods should not be seen in isolation. They should be used in conjunction to best answer the research question(s). This allows methods to 'cover' for each other's weaknesses.
2. There was a discussion on how methods could be used to infer causation. This covered both experimental (sometimes referred to as causal methods) and qualitative methods in which causation can be inferred from observation. A paper on the difference between statistical inference and logical inference by Clyde Mitchell from 1983 (Sociological Review) was suggested as a useful read for this discussion.

Research Methods – table

Method + contributor	Used in…			+ves	-ves	Notes
	Food waste	Food Safety	Nutri-tion			
Self-reported food diaries	Y	Y	Y		Over-report good behaviours, underreport bad.	FW diaries shown to underreport by around 40%. For consumption, specific effects seen in certain socio-demographic groups.
Observational video of in-home behaviour		Y		Over time, 'original' behaviour / habit can be seen		
Maps of kitchen and home		Y		Prompt / reminds people food activities happen all over the house		Used to identify where food-related activities take place
Controlled experiment (in this case followed by qualitative)			Y	Iterative approach – qualitative research informed		

				second wave of experiment		
Commentary on shop / accompanied shop	Y	Y				
Event sampling and ecological assessment			Y	Captures people in the moment; sampling can be when an event happens or random		Applied to research cravings and appetite, multivitamin uptake
Ethnography (part of mixed methods)	Y	Y	Y	Goes beyond what people say to observe what they are doing	Can get complex. Small samples	Holistic
Eye-tracking methods		Y	Y			Links behaviour and cause
Expert elicitation and Delphi	Y	?	?			For use where something is hard to measure
Life history	Y	Y	Y	Transitions over time and between generations	Lengthy	
Large-scale interventions with people						
Causal design (natural experiment, controlled experiment, quasi experiment)				Causal factors can be identified		
Analysis of big data (linked to previous item)						
Physiological measurements			Y			

Interventions

General comments

Clarification was required about what was an intervention – the word was used differently around the table. The idea of the session was to capture actions that could be taken – by businesses, organisations, governments, individuals and society – that could bring about change with regard to food waste prevention, food safety or improved nutrition.

There would be great merit in returning to the discussion on interventions with some more specific questions – there was a lot of very useful detail from the contributors.

Type of intervention	When to use	When not to use	Notes
Social media for food sharing			Concerns regarding sharing / food safety
Cameras in the fridge	Allows people to see contents of fridge when shopping (help with over purchasing) Could also be used in dieting.		Cultural appropriateness
Mobile phone apps (e.g. mobile phone apps and Fitbit)	Enter you meals, helps with positive reinforcement	People can "cheat" and people can be bad at self-monitoring	Needs to be v. v. easy, but can also be invasive
Taxation (sugar tax, bag tax, packaging legislation)			
Voluntary agreements (e.g. Courtauld Commitment)	CSR		
Food labelling (inc. smart labels and RFID tags)	When people can use and effectively understand	Can effect waste	Traffic light – didn't make much difference and confusing
Breakfast clubs	Can evaluate; reaches harder to reach groups		e.g. Wales and Blackpool
Personalised – psychology needs to be understood but self-efficacy must be reinforced			People need to be in control – no paternalism (otherwise, remove the intervention and there will be behavioural reversion)
Bans			e.g. salt in schools
Info (e.g. regulations on allergies)			Loose food sales
Food hygiene rating schemes	Mandatory in Scotland and Wales		Natural experiment
How food is presented	Plate size, positioning in canteens, etc.		
Cooking classes	Can engage on multiple issues		
Popular media	Can be antidote to punitive measures		Celebrity engagement can effect?
Event based intervention	Raise awareness		Difficult to gauge impact and fit into timescales
Pledges (e.g. cycling to Morocco – pledges rather than sponsorship)			