



Savanta:

# Making *all* voices heard

SAVANTA'S APPROACH TO INCLUSIVE RESEARCH PRACTICE  
AMONGST THOSE WITH VULNERABLE CHARACTERISTICS

make better decisions

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# We empower audiences through inclusive research design

**We are committed to promoting inclusion through participation by those with vulnerable characteristics, ensuring their views and experiences are represented.**

One of the reasons specific groups remain vulnerable and marginalised in society is because of the absence of their voices in policy making and public discourses about issues that matter to them.

Vulnerable individuals and groups can often be overlooked or considered too 'difficult' to include in conventional research studies. This happens when methods used are not sufficiently adapted or appropriate to take vulnerabilities into account, or when researchers are not willing to step outside the boundaries of conventional research.

**Savanta acknowledges the value of 'inclusive' research lies in promoting the resilience of individuals with vulnerabilities instead of focusing on their susceptibility.**

Through research with such audiences, we empower participants, and shift perceptions from 'subjects' to 'active partners'.

Voices of audiences with vulnerabilities have to be at the forefront of new research approaches and new ways of working together, and it is the responsibility of researchers to be more adaptive and creative in their approaches to research design and collaboration.

**Working with audiences in vulnerable situations is not only democratic and inclusive, but it can be truly transformative.**

By translating research findings into practice, products and services are improved which leads to lives being improved for the better. By using research to platform the voices of people who have experienced vulnerability, policy-makers, charities and corporates can make better informed decisions that champion the needs of those at risk of being left behind in our society.

**Let us know your challenges and the sensitivities of your project and we'll get to work.**



## CASE STUDY

# The British Red Cross: Women seeking asylum

### The Brief

Savanta partnered with the British Red Cross (BRC) and the VOICES Network to conduct a research study focused on amplifying the voices of women seeking asylum in the UK. The study aimed to address the challenges faced by female asylum seekers and ensure inclusivity and representation in the research process.

### The Actions

Workshops were held to design discussion guides, and peer interviewers from the VOICES Network, women with lived experience, conducted interviews with 37 women across the UK. This ensured inclusivity and representation in the study.

### The Outcome

The findings created the report "We want to be strong, but we don't have the chance" highlighting significant obstacles faced by female asylum seekers in accessing accommodation, support, and healthcare.

Furthermore, the study emphasized empowering women as co-producers of research, amplifying their voices in policy-making.



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# We take a nuanced approach to research with vulnerable audiences

**Vulnerability can be defined in many diverse ways.** It can take the form of personal characteristics or a set of situational circumstances that are out of a person's control.

Everyone has different needs, and these can be wide-ranging and often intersect.

- » For example, someone's age may make them more susceptible to harm and their gender identity may compound this vulnerability in certain contexts, but not in others.
- » Being in an abusive relationship, having a disability, experiencing addiction, living below the poverty line, having low digital literacy levels or uncertain legal status are all situations in which a person might be considered vulnerable.

**Vulnerability should therefore be acknowledged as a complex, dynamic state with varying degrees of contextual significance.**

People aren't intrinsically vulnerable, and vulnerability shouldn't be viewed as a defining characteristic of someone's personality.

**At Savanta, we take a nuanced approach to understanding the nature of the vulnerability that affects each individual.**

We maintain awareness of the distinction between more permanent characteristics such as long-term illness or cultural differences, and circumstances that are subject to change such as financial issues.

- » This allows for a **more focused approach to safeguarding** against harm when conducting research.
- » This also **avoids a categorical approach** to classifying groups of people with particular 'vulnerabilities'.
- » Instead, **we focus on the situations in which people might be considered vulnerable.**

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# In summary



## Inclusivity

**We adopt an inclusive approach to conducting research.** We understand how certain factors can affect a participant's ability to differentiate between genuine research or scamming activity, give informed consent, and contribute fully and equally in interview or group discussion.



## Sensitivity

We know that **being sensitive to language and actively taking steps to address the risks to participation that people** experiencing vulnerability may face are key to addressing power dynamics.



## Commitment

We are committed to working alongside **people with lived experienced of being marginalised**, and invest in ongoing learning to ensure the audiences we work with are protected.



## CASE STUDY

# Citizens Advice: No recourse to public funds

### **The Brief**

Through a groundbreaking collaboration with Citizens Advice, Savanta conducted research to gain insight into the lives of individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) in the UK. This population, estimated at 1.3 million people by the Institute for Public Policy, has faced significant challenges that have remained largely unknown.

### **The Actions**

Our research involved surveying 397 individuals and conducting nine deep-dive interviews, employing a mixed-methodology approach. This allowed us to comprehensively understand the diverse impacts of NRPF on individuals and communities, including emotional, physiological, and psychological effects such as isolation and exclusion from society.

### **The Outcome**

Our research provides crucial evidence supporting the call to end NRPF and contributes to the essential conversation surrounding this issue. The findings are presented in the published report titled “How do I survive now?“, offering valuable insights into the experiences of individuals with NRPF.

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# Ethical research: Savanta's **five** key principles

Savanta has extensive experience conducting research amongst people with vulnerabilities. **We strictly adhere to ethical regulations and procedures for research projects that involve participants experiencing vulnerability.**

**Our work is guided by the following five principles** informed by the Market Research Society Best Practice Guide on Research Participant Vulnerability and the Social Research Association Ethics Guidance:

**1**

## **Confidentiality and anonymity**

Research participants are informed that their participation and resultant data are kept **confidential and anonymous**, and that any sensitive personal data is not shared between Savanta and any unauthorised parties.

We respect the principle of anonymity and conceal participant identities by removing any identifying information from data shared beyond the immediate research team. Savanta deletes any **sensitive personal data** three months after a project concludes as standard practice.

**2**

## **Informed consent**

We make sure participants have freely agreed to participate in research, based upon an **understanding** of the purpose of it and what is expected of them. This is communicated in a way that is tailored to the individual.

In addition to this, we see **consent** as a continuous process rather than an irreversible decision: participants are aware that they can withdraw participation at any time. Savanta complies with any request from participants to destroy data that has been collected that refers to them.



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# Ethical research: Savanta's **five** key principles

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### Inclusivity and representation

Ensuring that research design and process is **mindful of participants and tailored to their needs** is a crucial part of every research project.

We aim to understand the context of participants and actively try to avoid making assumptions on their vulnerability and/or alienating them by excluding an entire group or community from research.

We engage with **relevant support groups/ organisations** (e.g. a debt advice charity) who have greater experience with groups with vulnerabilities when planning research.

## 4

### Accessibility

**Ease of participation** is at the forefront of what we do and we strive to make sure everyone can be included in a research project.

We consider all **accessibility options** and **design research materials** in the language and format of preference (e.g. large print, Braille), ensuring that participants do not decline participating or drop out on account of feeling uncomfortable if English may not be their first language.

## 5

### Avoiding harm

We prioritise **participant and researcher safety** in every research project. If there is a potential for harm, re-traumatisation, stigma, or increased vulnerability, we take **preventive measures**.

Our research teams consist of **certified professionals** with relevant expertise. **Post-interview support** is available to participants and researchers if required. In a recent project on harmful online content, we identified emotional risks and implemented safeguarding steps. At the end of the session, participants received a list of resources and support groups for additional assistance.



## CASE STUDY

# UK Management Consultancy: Understanding digital experience for vulnerable consumers

### **The Brief**

A management consultancy engaged Savanta to assess the challenges faced by vulnerable consumers in their online interactions with general insurance companies. The goal was to understand the practical and emotional impact of vulnerabilities on digital interactions and provide actionable insights.

### **The Actions**

Savanta conducted qualitative research, interviewing 36 individuals representing various vulnerable groups across four categories. The research employed a sensitive approach, utilizing a web-along technique to observe respondents' online experiences in real-time, including facial expressions and body language.

### **The Outcome**

Our research findings identified potential harm experienced by vulnerable consumers, including emotional stress and overpayment for insurance. We provided insurers with actionable improvement steps aligned with regulatory guidelines, empowering them to enhance customer experiences and create positive outcomes for vulnerable individuals.



## CASE STUDY

# Centre for Ageing Better: Reframing ageing

### The Brief

Savanta, in collaboration with Equally Ours, was commissioned by the Centre for Ageing Better to reframe the narratives of ageing through research. The objective was to understand prevailing narratives about ageing and provide guidelines for reframing ageing across sectors.

### The Actions

Savanta conducted a multi-stage research project including a literature review, in-depth interviews with stakeholders, discourse analysis, focus groups, and a national survey in England. Age-Friendly Manchester (AFM), an older people citizen's panel, played a vital role throughout the project, ensuring their lived experience was reflected in the interpretation of data.

### The Outcome

The research findings informed the creation of the report titled "Reframing Ageing: Public Perceptions of Ageing, Older Age and Demographic Change". The report equipped the Centre for Ageing Better with valuable insights and guidelines for reframing ageing narratives in various sectors, contributing to a more positive and inclusive perception of ageing in society.



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# Ethics and accessibility sit at the heart of our research methods

**Building on the key principles mentioned, we adapt all stages of the research project cycle as well as the methods used to facilitate the inclusion of participants with vulnerabilities.**

Some of the adjustments made throughout the project cycle to overcome barriers specific to each phase are outlined on the following pages.

**We believe that including the voices of groups with vulnerabilities in reports, debriefs, and published materials is crucial for ensuring that their perspectives and experiences are accurately represented, and their needs are addressed.**

By amplifying the voice of these audiences, we promote inclusivity, foster empowerment, and generate more informed and impactful outcomes that contribute to positive social change.



## Design

**Savanta puts inclusion at the core of our work, and as such, tailor research materials to the relevant group to ensure they are fit for purpose.**

We use brainstorming and co-creative approaches to design research materials. If a topic is too emotive or abstract, we employ projective tools or other techniques to help people feel comfortable expressing themselves.

Our team uses inclusive language and plain English when designing discussion guides and moderating fieldwork to ensure audiences do not feel alienated.

**We take a respondent-led approach when designing surveys** too by conducting cognitive testing to understand how respondents understand the questions asked.

When scripting surveys, we follow Savanta's Accessibility guidelines for scripting and AA compliance to ensure these are friendly to people with accessibility needs or those who use assistive technologies like screen readers. In addition, we have the capability to translate our surveys and discussion guides into any global language.

**Importantly, we understand the importance of demonstrating empathy and understanding when listening to participants describe traumatic life events.**

We anticipate this and ensure we have correct and emphatic responses on hand so participants feel comfortable when sharing their life experiences.



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## Data collection

**We commit to inclusivity and accessibility when conducting qualitative research**, ensuring that research activities are wheelchair accessible and respectful to audiences with vulnerabilities.

For in-person research, we carefully consider the venue to ensure it is inclusive and accessible, we select locations that are easily reachable by public transportation and offer a range of scheduling options to accommodate participants' availability and specific needs.

We subsidise childcare assistance for participants, where appropriate, and create a sensory-friendly environment.

During fieldwork, we spend longer at the start with warming up participants to make they **feel comfortable and in a safe sharing environment**, leaving difficult questions to the end. We offer fair compensation to participants for their time and contribution to the research.

**As fieldwork progresses, we remain adaptive and flexible.** Where appropriate, we suggest the inclusion of carers or trusted individuals (e.g. case workers) to ensure that respondents are able to fully, and safely, participate in qualitative research. Our moderators are trained to be able to flexibly adapt methods during fieldwork to fit participant needs.

Where relevant, **we use co-production and involve individuals with lived experience of the issues being explored.** This involves inviting people to collaborate, create, improve and develop the project, treating participants as co-researchers and experts by experience.

Working alongside people with lived experience to make decisions and solve problems means that decisions taken from the research are meaningful, impactful and sustainable.

## Analysis and Interpretation

**Our team adopts a respondent-led approach when interpreting research findings, giving priority to the perspectives of participants.**

We also use deliberative approaches to analyse the data, considering the broader context and issues surrounding the research.

This allows us to **gain a deeper understanding of the topic and provide comprehensive insights that reflect the diverse experiences of the participants.**

## Reporting and deliverables

**We aim to produce tailored deliverables that address the needs and expectations of all audiences.**

Savanta has delivered adapted reports for a number of clients, such as CDEI's "*Public attitudes to data and AI Tracker Wave 2*", which are accessible for users with impairments to their vision, hearing, mobility, and thinking and understanding.

CASE STUDY

# London Borough of Newham: Housing allocations policy consultation

## The Brief

Savanta conducted research for the London Borough of Newham to evaluate perceptions of proposed changes to the Housing Allocations Policy and understand their impact on specific groups. Our mixed-methods approach considered the socio-economic context in Newham.

## The Actions

To ensure inclusivity, we conducted six focus groups with Black residents, under 25s, people with disabilities, and South Asian residents with low English proficiency. We also conducted depth interviews, including in Sylheti, with residents who required it.

## The Outcome

Our research led to a revamp of the proposal by Newham Council, aligning it better with the preferences of its citizens. This outcome demonstrated the importance of engaging with affected groups and tailoring proposals accordingly.

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# Savanta's commitment to diversity and inclusion

Savanta is committed to embracing diversity and inclusion in all our activities. Our values **curious, brave, collaborative, empowering** and **entrepreneurial** underpin everything we do, from the way we work with our audiences, to how we work together as a team. These guiding principles ensure that Savanta is committed to a person-centered approach to working with people from different cultural backgrounds and with diverse life experiences.

We have an employee-led **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee**, which contains representatives from across the business who share ideas and hold management to account on strategy, unconscious bias and fair representation. Together the committee members gather feedback from across the organisation to

identify barriers and solutions, to ensure Savanta is delivering against our DEI strategy and pledge to the MRS Manifesto for Opportunity.

Our active **Charities & Volunteering Committee** organise fundraising and volunteering opportunities for Savanta employees with people living in a vulnerable situation in our local communities, such as in-store collections for foodbanks, and hosting activities for socially-isolated, older local residents. Each employee is allocated two volunteering days and are encouraged to participate in local events with colleagues from across different teams, as well as organise their own.

Savanta is proud to support individual fundraising efforts by promoting these on marketing channels (LinkedIn) and

donating to company-wide initiatives.

The committee also runs pro bono research for a nominated charity and raises awareness of their cause across the business to shed light on issues affecting vulnerable communities and ways in which we can contribute towards making positive social change.

Savanta is a signatory to the MRS Manifesto for Opportunity and a member of the Market Research Society (MRS) who recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with diversity awareness group **Colour of Research (CORe)** to strengthen collaboration between the two organisations. CORe was founded in June 2020 to address and raise awareness of the lack of ethnic minority representation in the research industry.



## CASE STUDY

# The Financial Conduct Authority: Understanding cash reliance

### **The Brief**

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) enlisted Savanta to conduct qualitative research on access to cash for individuals with vulnerabilities. The objective was to explore the challenges faced by approximately one hundred individuals across the UK who rely on cash, including those with long-term health conditions, low digital confidence, and low financial resilience.

### **The Actions**

Savanta conducted qualitative research on behalf of the FCA, engaging approximately one hundred individuals with vulnerabilities and a reliance on cash. Specialized training was provided to the project team, and relevant support materials were compiled for participants.

### **The Outcome**

The findings were synthesized into a published report titled "Understanding Cash Reliance" which informed the FCA's exploration of policy solutions. The research emphasized the need to prevent exclusion of cash-dependent individuals in a cashless society, contributing to the development of inclusive policies in this area.





## CASE STUDY

# UK Power Networks: Feedback on the business plan

### **The Brief**

UKPN sought customer views for their RIIO-ED2 business planning process. Savanta conducted a substantial qualitative research approach to gather insights from a diverse range of domestic and business customers, including marginalized groups such as those in fuel poverty, non-English speakers, and individuals with vulnerabilities or disabilities.

### **The Actions**

Our approach involved 42 focus groups and 66 tele-depth interviews. We prioritized inclusive recruitment and used multiple research modes to accommodate participants' preferences. We provided contextual information and collaborated with the client, external experts, and participants to develop stimulus materials that facilitated diverse feedback.

### **The Outcome**

The research ensured that customer views from traditionally neglected groups were included in UKPN's business planning process. The insights gathered helped inform the organization's future business plans, incorporating meaningful feedback from diverse backgrounds.

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# Experts in conducting research with audiences with vulnerabilities



**Meghan Oliver**  
Senior Director

Meghan works with clients across the public, private and third sectors to deliver meaningful, actionable insights. Her passion is to ensure that inclusion is foundational to the research process from inception through to delivery. This ensures that those with characteristics of vulnerability have an active voice in the research and clients can be confident of the relevancy of findings.

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**Nicola Archer**  
Senior Director

Nicola works in close partnership with public and not-for-profit clients to deliver research that is inclusive and accessible. She has particular expertise in multicultural and multinational research, and challenging both research design and content to be open and relevant to a range of audiences.

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**Kathy Ellison**  
Director

Kathy has been working in insight for over 30 years and is a financial research specialist, working with clients across many different product lines including lending, banking, payments, pensions, protection and insurance among businesses, consumers and intermediaries. She has focused on vulnerable customers and is currently leading on a large number of projects on Consumer Duty.

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