

## Qualitative Guidelines

Our colleagues at *Social Science and Medicine* have produced useful guidelines for the authors of papers employing qualitative methods. We endorse these guidelines and commend them as guidance for authors preparing qualitative papers for Health and Place:

There is no one qualitative method, but rather a number of research approaches which fall under the umbrella of 'qualitative methods'. The various social science disciplines tend to have different conventions on best practice in qualitative research. Health and Place gives the following general guidance for the writing and assessment of papers which present qualitative data (either alone or in combination with quantitative methods). General principles of good practice for all research will also apply.

### **Fitness for purpose**

Are the methods of the research appropriate to the nature of the question(s) being asked, i.e.

- \* Does the research seek to understand social processes or social structures &/or to illuminate subjective experiences or meanings?
- \* Are the settings, groups or individuals being examined of a type which cannot be pre-selected, or the possible outcomes not specified (or hypothesised) in advance?

### **Methodology and methods**

- \* All papers must include a dedicated methods section which specifies, as appropriate, the sample recruitment strategy, sample size, and analytical strategy.

### **Principles of selection**

Qualitative research is often based on or includes non-probability sampling. The unit(s) of research may include one or a combination of people, events, institutions, samples of natural behaviour, conversations, written and visual material, etc.

- \* The selection of these should be theoretically justified e.g. it should be made clear how respondents were selected
- \* There should be a rationale for the sources of the data (e.g. respondents/participants, settings, documents)
- \* Consideration should be given to whether the sources of data (e.g. people, organisations, documents) were unusual in some important way
- \* Any limitations of the data should be discussed (such as non response, refusal to take part)

### **The research process**

In most papers there should be consideration of

- \* The access process
- \* How data were collected and recorded
- \* Who collected the data
- \* When the data were collected
- \* How the research was explained to respondents/participants

### **Research ethics**

\* Details of formal ethical approval (i.e. IRB, Research Ethics Committee) should be stated in the main body of the paper. If authors were not required to obtain ethical approval (as is the case in some countries) or unable to obtain ethical approval (as sometimes occurs in resource-poor settings) they should explain this. Please anonymise this information as appropriate in the manuscript, and give the information when asked during submission.

- \* Procedures for securing informed consent should be provided

Any ethical concerns that arose during the research should be discussed.

### **Analysis**

The process of analysis should be made as transparent as possible (notwithstanding the conceptual and theoretical creativity that typically characterises qualitative research). For example

- \* How was the analysis conducted
  - \* How were themes, concepts and categories generated from the data
  - \* Whether analysis was computer assisted (and, if so, how)
  - \* Who was involved in the analysis and in what manner
- \* Assurance of analytic rigour. For example
  - \* Steps taken to guard against selectivity in the use of data
  - \* Triangulation
  - \* Inter-rater reliability
  - \* Member and expert checking
  - \* The researcher's own position should clearly be stated. For example, have they examined their own role, possible bias, and influence on the research (reflexivity)?

### **Presentation of findings**

### **Consideration of context**

The research should be clearly contextualised. For example

- \* Relevant information about the settings and respondents/participants should be supplied
- \* The phenomena under study should be integrated into their social context (rather than being abstracted or de-contextualised)

- \* Any particular/unique influences should be identified and discussed

Presentation of data:

- \* Quotations, field notes, and other data where appropriate should be identified in a way which enables the reader to judge the range of evidence being used
- \* Distinctions between the data and their interpretation should be clear
- \* The iteration between data and explanations of the data (theory generation) should be clear
- \* Sufficient original evidence should be presented to satisfy the reader of the relationship between the evidence and the conclusions (validity)
- \* There should be adequate consideration of cases or evidence which might refute the conclusions