

## Criteria for the evaluation of qualitative research papers

Adopted by the Medical Sociology Group of the British Sociological Association, 1996

### **1. Are the methods of the research appropriate to the nature of the question being asked?**

- Does the research seek to understand processes or structures, or illuminate subjective experiences or meanings?
- Are the categories or groups being examined of a type which cannot be pre-selected, or the possible outcomes cannot be specified in advance?
- Could a quantitative approach have addressed the issue better?

### **2. Is the connection to an existing body of knowledge or theory clear?**

- Is there adequate reference to the literature?
- Does the work cohere with, or critically address, existing theory?

## Methods

### **3. Are there clear accounts of the criteria used for the selection of subjects for study, and of the data collection and analysis?**

### **4. Is the selection of cases or participants theoretically justified?**

- The unit of research may be people, or events, institutions, samples of natural behaviour, conversations, written material, etc. In any case, while random sampling may not be appropriate, is it nevertheless clear what population the sample refers to?
- Is consideration given to whether the units chosen were unusual in some important way?

### **5. Does the sensitivity of the methods match the needs of the research questions?**

- Does the method accept the implications of an approach which respects the perceptions of those being studied?
- To what extent are any definitions or agendas taken for granted, rather than being critically examined or left open?
- Are the limitations of any structured interview method considered?

### **6. Has the relationship between field workers and subjects been considered, and is there evidence about how the research was presented and explained to its subjects?**

- If more than one worker was involved, has comparability been considered?
- Is there evidence about how the subjects perceived the research?
- Is there evidence about how any group processes were conducted?

**7. Was the data collection and record keeping systematic?**

- Were careful records kept?
- Is the evidence available for independent examination?
- Were full records or transcripts of conversations used if appropriate?

**Analysis**

**8. Is reference made to accepted procedures for analysis?**

- Is it clear how the analysis is done? (Detailed repetition of how to perform standard procedures ought not to be expected).
- Has its reliability been considered, ideally by independent repetition?

**9. How systematic is the analysis?**

- What steps were taken to guard against selectivity in the use of data?
- In research with individuals, is it clear that there has not been selection of some cases and ignoring of less-interesting ones? In group research, are all categories of opinion taken into account?

**10. Is there adequate discussion of how themes, concepts and categories were derived from the data?**

- It is sometimes inevitable that externally given or predetermined descriptive categories are used, but have they been examined for their real meaning or any possible ambiguities?

**11. Is there adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments?**

- Are negative data given? Has there been any search for cases which might refute the conclusions?

**12. Have measures been taken to test the validity of the findings?**

- For instance, have methods such as feeding findings back to the respondents, triangulation, or procedures such as grounded theory been used?

**13. Have any steps been taken to see whether the analysis would be comprehensible to the participants, if this is possible and relevant?**

- Has the meaning of their accounts been explored with respondents? Have apparent anomalies and contradictions been discussed with them, rather than assumptions being made?

**Presentation**

**14. Is the research clearly contextualized?**

- Is all the relevant information about the setting and subjects supplied?
- Are the cases or variables which are being studied integrated in their social context, rather than being abstracted and decontextualized?

**15. Are the data presented systematically?**

- Are quotations, field notes, etc. identified in a way which enables the reader to judge the range of evidence being used?