



Editorial

Will my work be published?

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Part of the journal's mission is to support developing colleagues with better signposting to good science. This involves providing education and training, encouraging better use of theory and making more explicit use of reporting guidelines. We started some of this work at the symposium at June's EADPH conference in Vilnius.

As we put the finishing touches to the December issue, I reflected on whether the advice given in the symposium had been appropriate and effective. The answers were "Yes" and "No" respectively. So, with a relevant message that might not have reached everyone, I offer a new checklist for authors planning research or preparing for submission. Of course, editors and referees review papers for the journal using very similar criteria. Authors should ask themselves the following two questions and be guided by the sub-questions within each category.

Who would want to read my paper?

The purposes of epidemiology are to find the causes and determinants of health and disease, to identify solutions to those causes and determinants and then to help evaluate those solutions. Ask yourself if you are fulfilling one of those purposes.

Ask yourself if you have found out something new and important. Have you searched to see if other studies have found similar things? What difference will your findings make? A good adjunct here is to ask yourself whether your discussion merely compares your own findings with other researchers'. If so, then you probably need to add more to knowledge.

Next, ask yourself whether your findings are generalisable. Will they help readers in another part of the world? Whilst the prevalence of caries in a city is very important for local service planning, it will be less relevant to colleagues elsewhere. Descriptive epidemiology tends to be less generalisable than relationships between variables. Generalisation is often thought to be quantitative (by comparing numbers and statistics), but may also be qualitative, where the concepts identified in one place may be generalisable to another in a theoretical sense (we might call this 'contribution to theory').

Does my research meet its aim?

To meet its aim your research must be adequately designed and conducted. A formal research training (a PhD)

and experience are fantastic opportunities, but may be unattainable for some colleagues. Where possible, new researchers should work with senior colleagues to gain experience. Even the simple act of collaboration with another junior researcher will help you identify aspects of quality that need improvement.

Then ask yourself if you have studied your research methods in methodology texts and papers. You can also study similar papers to your own to see what others have done. Ask yourself if there is a reporting checklist such as STROBE (2009) and CONSORT (2010) that you should consult. They are invaluable even when designing research, and are necessary when you report your findings.

Ask yourself if you are making adequate use of theory. Explicitly mapping the theories at the heart of your research problems helps you (and the reader) understand the relationships between variables and so gives a detailed and coherent basis for your work. Consequently, theory guides your data analysis and your interpretation of the results. The paper by Rie Suzuki in this issue has a simple conceptual model that explains her purpose and reassures the reader that her analysis is not a random finding in a series of cross-tabs. Baker and Gibson (2014) have argued eloquently on this need for theory, and once again I commend their important paper.

In conclusion

This guide is playful and hardly comprehensive. It will only be useful if authors apply it to their work honestly. It would be fantastic to see more of you getting your research published.

References

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