

Editorial

Authors

Stacy Carter

Jonine Jancey

A journal for and with health promotion practitioners and researchers

Representatives of the Journal's editorial team enjoyed meeting practitioners and researchers during a workshop at the recent Australian Health Promotion Association National Conference in Sydney. We appreciated this opportunity to discuss how things look from 'the editors' desk', and to hear the perspectives of authors, potential authors, and reviewers.

Workshop participants were keen to know what we look for as editors. The best manuscripts are those that have a clear focus and tell a coherent story, answering specific questions using appropriate research methods. Good manuscripts have a title and abstract that accurately represent their contents, and are so interesting that they make us want to read on!

Manuscripts based on quantitative studies need to report sample sizes sufficient to support the conclusions, should explicitly discuss potential biases or other limitations, and should provide enough information about methods so that the study could be replicated. Authors of qualitative studies should explain how their sampling strategies, data collection methods and analysis strategies were appropriate to answer their research questions, provide enough detail about methods to enable readers to evaluate quality, and demonstrate that the analyst has sought out variation and tried to prove themselves wrong (rather than looking only for favourable, expected or straightforward answers).

The editorial team are especially keen to publish well-designed intervention studies. However, we also agree on the importance of qualitative research in health promotion, particularly for understanding how health promotion works and investigating the perspectives of research participants. We will consider theoretical pieces and essays but these need to be well-argued with reference to the relevant evidence base. Authors may consider writing a brief report rather than a full length article: brief reports are an excellent forum for a single, interesting finding, a key idea, or description of an innovative program or project.

About half of manuscripts submitted to the journal are rejected. Common reasons for rejection include: absence of a clear message, poor quality study design, insufficient originality or contribution to the literature (for example, if the research question has been answered many times before or is not important), poor reasoning (for example, if the argument is invalid because it relies on problematic assumptions), or insufficient data or analysis to support the conclusions. Authors who respond systematically and convincingly to reviewer comments have a much greater chance of being published: reviewer feedback can significantly improve the readability and quality of final manuscripts. Note that manuscripts will not be rejected because they report negative findings, as long as authors can demonstrate that these make a contribution to the literature.

A long conversation was had about ethical oversight for health promotion research, particularly for research that occurs within health promotion services. Like all reputable journals internationally, and in line with the policies and guidelines of the Australian Health Ethics Committee, National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council and many international organisations,¹⁻⁶ any research involving human participants published in the HPJA must have formal and documented ethical oversight from an appropriately constituted Human Research Ethics Committee. Although this is vital, researchers in health promotion services are often not adequately trained or resourced in this regard. This has become a priority issue for the editors to consider, and we welcome input from the health promotion community on how health promotion researchers and practitioners can be better supported to obtain appropriate ethical oversight for their work.

The basics of peer-reviewed publishing are as true for HPJA as for any other journal. Authors need to have a well-designed, original study to write about, to know what they want to write, why, and for whom, and to write clearly and honestly. The story needs to be interesting, and the significance of the results needs to be explained. There are many important research projects going on in health promotion, and we are keen to publish their findings. The editors' central priority is to continue to improve the quality, profile, impact and relevance of HPJA. This will ensure the journal attracts and retain subscribers, authors and readers and can serve health promotion better. To achieve our goal, we need to publish research that is new, interesting and useful, and most importantly, relevant to practice. We look forward to receiving your manuscripts soon!

References

1. World Medical Association. WMA Declaration of Helsinki - Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects. <http://www.wma.net/en/30publications/10policies/b3/17c.pdf>; World Medical Association; 1964, 2008.
2. National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research Canberra: Australian Government; 2007, updated 2009.
3. National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, Universities Australia. Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. Canberra: Australian Government; 2007.
4. International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Writing and Editing for Biomedical Publication. http://www.icmje.org/urm_full.pdf; International Committee of Medical Journal Editors; 2010.
5. World Association of Medical Editors Publication Ethics Committee. Publication Ethics Policies for Medical Journals. <http://www.wame.org/resources/publication-ethics-policies-for-medical-journals>; World Association of Medical Editors; 2013.
6. Committee on Publication Ethics. Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors. http://publicationethics.org/files/Code_of_conduct_for_journal_editors.pdf; Committee on Publication Ethics; 2011.