

## ***Sociology of Health & Illness - Publication Ethics***

This statement is based on the *Guidelines on Publication Ethics* published in 1999 by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), representing most leading medical journals, with modifications appropriate for social scientific work. Further information about COPE can be found at [www.publicationethics.org.uk/](http://www.publicationethics.org.uk/). This statement will guide the editorial team, the editorial board and referees in their approach to any ethical issues arising in respect of papers submitted to *Sociology of Health and Illness*. It seeks to distinguish between issues of responsible professional behaviour, to be promoted by editors, board and referees, and misconduct, possibly deserving formal censure by the scientific community.

### **Rights of Research Participants**

Research participants have fundamental rights to privacy and to make autonomous decisions about whether or not to take part in studies. *SHI* aims only to publish research that shows respect for these rights and the editors will question as possible misconduct any submission suggesting that these rights were unjustifiably breached.

- a) Where research participants are recruited from among patients or by means of health system sources or health system records, formal and documented approval from an appropriately constituted research ethics committee is required in accordance with national laws and regulations. Authors need not submit this documentation routinely but it must be made available to the editors on request without unreasonable delay.
- b) Where research participants are recruited by other means, approval from an appropriately constituted research ethics committee is not required, except where national laws and regulations direct. However, authors must be prepared to show that their work meets appropriate ethical standards, possibly by reference to the published code of a relevant professional association. Authors need not submit this documentation routinely but it must be made available to the editors on request without unreasonable delay.
- c) Fully informed consent should always be sought where possible and appropriate. Where this is not possible, authors should justify this decision by reference to approval from an appropriately constituted research ethics committee, the published code of a relevant professional association, by explicit discussion in the submitted paper or by citation to other reasonably accessible publications from the research that discuss the issue fully.
- d) Where participants are unable to give fully informed consent, researchers have a particular responsibility to demonstrate and document in a submitted paper or by citation to other reasonably accessible publications from the research that their research has adopted a high ethical standard.
- e) Where covert research or deception is involved, authors must explicitly justify this in the submitted paper, or by citation to other reasonably accessible publications from the research that discuss the issue fully.

### **Responsibilities of Authors**

#### **1) Who is an Author?**

There is no universally agreed definition of authorship. To avoid disputes over attribution of academic credit, it is helpful to decide early on in the planning of a research project who will be credited as authors and who will be acknowledged. In a multidisciplinary project, it is also likely to be useful, at the same time, to identify the relevant professional codes of ethics and to consider any potential conflicts. In matters concerning authorship, the editors will give particular attention to the policy statements of the British Sociological Association,

[http://www.britisoc.co.uk/index.php?link\\_id=12&area=item1](http://www.britisoc.co.uk/index.php?link_id=12&area=item1). However, certain general points apply.

- a) The award of authorship should balance intellectual contributions to the conception, design, analysis and writing of the study against the collection of data and other routine work. If there is no task that can reasonably be attributed to a particular individual, then that individual should not be credited with authorship.
- b) All named authors must take public responsibility for the overall content of their paper. Where the paper involves multidisciplinary work, individuals may identify their particular contributions but remain collectively responsible for the overall result, particularly in relation to compliance with the principles set out in this statement.
- c) The identity of the principal investigator should always be clear or provided to the editors on request without unreasonable delay. Although he or she need not be named as an author, the principal investigator is always ultimately responsible for the ethical standards of research projects under his or her jurisdiction.

#### **2) Study Design**

Research participants have a right to expect that the studies in which they are involved are carried out to appropriate standards of scholarship. Poor quality research is inherently abusive of participants and, hence, unethical. *SHI* editors and referees will seek to ensure that published papers promote a high standard of scholarship in sociology.

- a) Research should have a clear and documented design or strategy directed to specific and justifiable questions rather than being an unguided trawling for data.
- b) Where relevant, statistical issues should be considered early in study design, including power calculations, to ensure that there are neither too few nor too many participants.

- c) All contributors and collaborators, including participants where appropriate, should agree the design or strategy.
- d) The design or strategy should be clearly described in any publication and available in full to any legitimate inquirer.

### **3) Data Analysis**

Research participants have a right to expect that data will be appropriately analysed, although inappropriate analysis does not necessarily amount to misconduct. *SHI* editors and referees will seek to ensure that published papers promote a high standard of scholarship in sociology. Fabrication and/or falsification of data do, however, constitute misconduct, although both must be distinguished from the legitimate editing of qualitative data to protect the identities of research participants. This constitutes misconduct only if its net effect is to alter the substance or evidential value of the data involved.

- a) All sources and methods used to obtain and analyse data, including any electronic pre-processing, should be fully disclosed to the extent consistent with protecting the identity of individual participants or research sites where anonymity has been offered; detailed explanations should be provided for any exclusions.
- b) Methods of analysis must be explained in detail and referenced, if they are not in common use.
- c) The *post hoc* statistical analysis of subgroups is acceptable, as long as this is disclosed. Failure to disclose that the analysis was *post hoc* is unacceptable.
- d) The discussion section of a paper should mention any issues of bias that have been considered, and explain how they have been dealt with in the design and interpretation of the study.

### **4) Plagiarism**

Other scholars have a right to expect that any use of their ideas or data will be given proper credit. Plagiarism ranges from the unreferenced use of others published and unpublished ideas, including research grant applications, to submission a complete paper, sometimes in a different language, which is passed off as the work of the person submitting it rather than the original author. It may occur at any stage of planning, research, writing or publication; it applies equally to print and electronic versions. All sources must be disclosed, and, if large amounts of other people's written or illustrative material are to be used, permission must be obtained and presented to editors. Authors are responsible for any costs involved in this. Plagiarism will always be considered as possible misconduct.

### **5) Redundant Publication**

Redundant publication occurs when two or more papers, without full cross-reference, share the same hypothesis, data, discussion points or conclusions. It is accepted in an interdisciplinary field like medical sociology that it will often be appropriate to publish similar material in journals with different readerships so that findings receive appropriate dissemination. The problem occurs when this is not acknowledged through relevant self-citation, giving a misleading impression to readers. Redundant publication can only constitute misconduct if there is a breach of the following principles and there is a deliberate deception of editors, referees and readers.

- a) Published studies do not need to be repeated unless further confirmation is required. In sociology, however, it is recognised that knowledge often advances by the accumulation of small-scale studies under different social and environmental conditions and that social or cultural changes over time may make it appropriate to repeat previous studies. What is important is that the new work is clearly justified and related to previous studies in order to show what it has added to knowledge.
- b) Previous publication in the proceedings of a conference does not preclude subsequent submission for publication but should be disclosed to editors at the time of submission.
- c) Re-publication of a paper previously published only in a language other than English will be considered, provided that this is fully disclosed to the editors at the time of submission and acknowledged in any published version. The authors will be responsible for obtaining any necessary copyright clearance and meeting any costs involved in this.
- d) At the time of submission, authors should disclose details of related papers, even if in a different language, and similar papers forthcoming or in press.

### **6) Conflicts of Interest**

Conflicts of interest are those of an author's commitments that may not be fully apparent to the reader of a paper or those commitments that may influence the judgements of reviewers or editors. The key question is whether the subsequent revelation of these commitments would make a reasonable reader feel misled or deceived. Commitments may be personal, commercial, political, academic or financial. Relevant interests must be declared to editors by authors. A conflict of interest can only constitute misconduct if there is a deliberate deception of editors, referees and readers.

### **7) Media Relations**

Social science findings are less commonly of interest to the media than those of medical research. Nevertheless, authors may still need to balance the competing interests of funders and investigators in high-profile public dissemination with the scholarly objective of ensuring that new knowledge is only accepted as a valid addition to the discipline, canon or science as a result of rigorous and disinterested

peer review. Where possible, publication in the mass media should not precede publication in a peer-reviewed journal, which means that the findings have been affirmed by the scholarly community as a valid addition to the available body of knowledge. The editors encourage authors to publicise research published in the journal in mass media and offer support for this on request (e.g.: drafting or issuing press releases, responding to media queries etc).

## **Responsibilities of Principal Investigators**

### **1) Who is a Principal Investigator (PI)?**

A PI is the person with overall responsibility for a research team, the holder of a research grant or the supervisor of a PhD student. The PI is always ultimately accountable for the ethical standards of research projects under his or her jurisdiction. As such, PIs are may share culpability for research misconduct unless they can show that they have made reasonable efforts to implement processes and structures that promote research of high scientific and ethical quality.

### **2) What are PIs responsible for?**

- a) PIs must ensure that people for whom they are responsible are aware of the requirements of national laws and regulations for the protection of human subjects and of the ethical codes of the relevant professional bodies.
- b) PIs should ensure the retention of all data, records and primary outputs according to local regulations so that subsequent inquiries can be properly addressed. Where local regulations or practices do not specify a duration, we recommend that all materials should be preserved for at least seven years from the date of the last published output. Where appropriate with regard to the confidentiality of informants, material should then be considered for deposit in a suitable archive for the benefit of other scholars.
- c) PIs should consider whether they have any conflicts of interest that might compromise publications from those for whom they are responsible, whether they are credited as an author or not. It may be appropriate to disclose these to editors alongside the disclosures of authors.

The editors encourage authors to publicise research published in the journal in mass media and offer support for this on request (e.g. drafting or issuing press releases, responding to media queries).

## **Responsibilities of Referees (Reviewers)**

### **1) Who is a Referee?**

Referees are external experts chosen by editors to provide written opinions on submissions, with the aim of improving them. Self-nominations to the pool of referees are welcomed but there is no obligation on editors to adopt these. The referees' role is to advise the editors. The final responsibility for decisions on what is and is not published rests with the editors, who may reach a different conclusion from referees, based on their wider view of the pool of submissions and the pressures on journal space. *Sociology of Health and Illness* treats peer review as a confidential process, although referees are free to sign their advice and disclose their identity to authors if they choose to.

### **2) What are the responsibilities of referees?**

- a) Referees should provide constructive, speedy, accurate, courteous, unbiased and justifiable reports.
- b) Referees must not make any use of data, arguments or interpretations in papers they are invited to review, unless they have the author's permission.
- c) Referees must maintain the confidentiality of the manuscripts that they are asked to assess. This extends to referees colleagues who may be asked (with the editors permission) to give opinions on specific sections.
- d) Referees must declare relevant interests and possible conflicts to editors when they are invited to review a manuscript.
- e) If referees suspect that research misconduct has occurred, they should first draw this to the attention of the editors in confidence.
- f) Referees have a particular obligation to consider possible plagiarism in papers that they are evaluating and to draw the editor's attention in confidence to any material that they consider to be problematic.

### **3) Complaints**

If authors are dissatisfied with the quality of peer review for *Sociology of Health & Illness*, they must first draw their concerns to the attention of the editors, or the Monograph Editor if the paper was submitted for a Monograph. If their concerns are not satisfactorily resolved, they may then ask for them to be reviewed by the Chair of the Editorial Board, or such independent person as the Chair may nominate. The decision of the Chair, or the independent person, shall be final and binding on all parties.

## **Responsibilities of Editors**

### **1) Role of Editors**

a) Under the constitution of *Sociology of Health & Illness*, the editors direct the journal, with the support and guidance of the Editorial Board and the Trustees of the Foundation. They must consider and balance the interests of many constituents, including readers, authors, publishers, staff, board members, advertisers and the wider community. They have exclusive responsibility for decisions about whether to accept or reject papers. In matters of possible research misconduct, they will work closely with the Chair of the Editorial Board and the representatives of the publishers.

b) The Monograph and Book Reviews Editors. The Monograph Editor and Book Reviews Editor are appointed by the Editorial Board and responsible to the Board. In collaboration with the Editorial Board, the Trustees of the Foundation and the Editors, they are responsible for the Monograph series and the Book Reviews respectively. The Guest Editor for each monograph has responsibility, in collaboration with the Monograph Editor, for decisions about whether to accept or reject papers for the Monograph.

### **2) General Duties**

a) Editors decisions to accept or reject a paper for publication will be based only on the papers importance, originality and clarity and its relevance to the remit of the journal, relative to the pool of papers under consideration at the time and the space available in the journal.

b) Editors will treat all submitted papers as confidential.

c) Editors will not make any use of data, arguments or interpretations in papers submitted for publication, unless they have the author's permission.

d) Editors will screen all papers submitted for publication to determine whether they are relevant to the remit of the journal and show sufficient potential importance, originality and clarity to justify forwarding them for peer review.

e) All original studies passing the editorial screen will be peer-reviewed before publication, taking into account possible biases due to conflicting or related interests. Where papers have been commissioned, this will be clearly identified.

f) Studies that challenge work previously published in the journal will be given sympathetic consideration.

g) Studies that report negative results will not be excluded from consideration.

h) If a published paper is subsequently found to contain major flaws, editors will ensure that the record is corrected prominently and promptly.

i) Editors will disclose relevant interests to readers. Where conflicts of interest have implications for the review process, this will be led by another member of the editorial team or referred to the Chair of the Editorial Board. In particular, any submission by a member of the editorial team, a research fellow currently working on a grant held by a team member, a graduate student currently supervised by a team member or by a current collaborator of a team member will be referred to the Chair of the Editorial Board to conduct the review process.

### **3) Advertising**

Advertising in *Sociology of Health & Illness* is a matter for the determination of the publishers.

a) Editorial decisions will not be influenced by advertising revenue or reprint potential.

b) The publishers will endeavour to ensure that all advertisements meet current UK regulatory requirements for truthfulness, taste and integrity.