

Evidence *summaries*

Reporting standards for organisational case studies

■ This summary is based on a project to identify the characteristics of good quality organisational case study research and devise reporting standards with particular application to the UK NHS

■ The reporting standards were developed in three stages:

- ◆ a rapid review of the existing literature to identify reporting items
- ◆ a modified Delphi consensus process with a panel of experts to develop and refine the structure and content
- ◆ application of the list of high-consensus Delphi items to samples of organisational case studies to assess their feasibility as reporting standards

■ The standards aim to improve the consistency, rigour and reporting of organisational case study research

■ The standards are intended primarily as a tool for authors of organisational case studies

■ The standards outline broad requirements for rigorous and consistent reporting, without constraining methodological freedom



We are one of two national Evidence Synthesis Centres commissioned by the NIHR Health Services and Delivery Research Programme to provide timely and contextualised access to the best evidence on topics of key importance to the NHS (Project ref: 13/05/11).

For each topic we synthesise the evidence and summarise our evaluation of the quality and strength of findings. We produce targeted outputs in appropriate formats to make it as straightforward as possible for decision makers to use research evidence.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NIHR or the Department of Health.

What is an organisational case study?

Case study is a method of research that engages in close, detailed examination of a single example or phenomenon, and is often used to understand activity and behaviour within a real-life context. Organisational case studies are concerned with an organised body of people with a particular purpose, such as a business, government department, or charity group.

Why are reporting standards needed?

The broad diversity of approaches used within organisational case studies mean that any attempt to develop 'definitive' methodological guidance in this area is likely to be highly contentious and resource-intensive. However, clearly reported methods will help research funders, peer-reviewers, and other research users assess methodological quality. A search of the EQUATOR (Enhancing the QUALity and Transparency Of health Research) clearinghouse (<http://www.equator-network.org/>) for reporting guidelines found that there were no reporting standards for organisational case studies.

Scope of the reporting standards

The aim of the reporting standards is to improve the consistency, rigour and reporting of organisational case study research to make it useful to different audiences.

Consensus standards for the reporting of organisational case studies

Reporting item	Reported on page no.	Justification for not reporting given on page no.
Describing the design		
1	Define the research as a case study	
2	State the broad aims of the study	
3	State the research question(s)/hypotheses	
4	Identify the specific case(s) and justify the selection	
Describing the data collection		
5	Describe how data were collected	
6	Describe the sources of evidence used	
7	Describe any ethical considerations and obtainment of relevant approvals, access and permissions	
Describing the data analysis		
8	Describe the analysis methods	
Interpreting the results		
9	Describe any inherent shortcomings in the design and analysis and how these might have influenced the findings	
10	Consider the appropriateness of methods used for the question and subject matter and why it was that qualitative methods were appropriate	
11	Discuss the data analysis	
12	Ensure that the assertions are sound, neither over- nor under-interpreting the data	
13	State any caveats about the study	

Rodgers M, Thomas S, Harden M, Parker G, Street A, Eastwood A. Developing a methodological framework for organisational case studies: a rapid review and consensus development process. *Health Serv Deliv Res* 2016;4(1)

<http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr/volume-4/issue-1#abstract>

The reporting standards will be helpful for authors of organisational case study research; research sponsors making funding decisions for proposed case studies; ethics and research advisory groups requiring clarity about planned methods; peer-reviewers evaluating the robustness of a completed case study; and readers and policy makers interpreting and implementing the findings of organisational case studies.

How to use the reporting standards

The standards require the author to refer to the location in their published case study where each reporting item was met, or alternatively where a justification for the absence of the item can be found. The standards are not intended to be a guide on how to undertake an organisational case study.

Future research

While the proposed reporting standards are based on a high level of consensus among a group of experts, their true value cannot be fully established until they have been applied in practice. Further consultation with relevant experts will be necessary to build engagement with the reporting standards for organisational case studies among various audiences, and to collect evidence that could be used to evaluate and refine the standards.