

Critical evaluation of research in Health Psychology

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Getting started.....

- What is the main line of reasoning (the main argument)?
- What is the key evidence used to support the line of argument?
- When was the evidence produced? Is it up to date? Is it still relevant?
- Is the evidence presented in a way that develops the argument and leads clearly to the conclusion?

The basics...

- What type of article is it?
- Research paper?
 - Research study?
 - Systematic review?
 - Meta analysis?
- Position piece?
- Policy document?
- Editorial?
- Blog?

The basics...

- Who are the authors?
- Where are they from?
 - Which university?
 - Which country?
- Was it a funded study?
 - If so who funded it?

The basics...

- When was it published?
 - Old or new article?
 - “classic study”?
 - New theory/model?
- What journal is it published in?
 - BPS/APA?

The study

- What type of study is it?
 - Qualitative V Quantitative
 - Be wary of drawing conclusions from small qualitative studies
 - Qual studies tend to provide an in-depth understanding of a particular issue but cannot be easily generalised
 - Qual studies often extremely important if exploring a new/emerging area/issue (can inform future quantitative studies)

The study

The sample

- Small or large sample size?
- *How generalisable are the results?*
- *Who were included/excluded?*
- *What were the characteristics of the sample?*
- *(how representative are they?)*

The Data

- What type of data is collected?
 - Standardised psychometric scales?
 - Valid? Reliable? Robust?
 - Experimental data (reaction times, IATs etc)
 - Tests of models and theories?

The analysis

- Are the research questions and analyses clearly explained?
- How valid do the results seem to be?
- How reliable do the results seem to be?
 - Researcher bias?
 - Failure to consider alternative positions of frameworks?

Methodological Critique

- How could the study have been done better?
- Do the authors acknowledge the limitations of their work?
- No such thing as a perfect study!

What are the limitations of the paper?

- How can I get the knowledge claims of the paper into some kind of perspective?
- What are the aspects of the paper that may be ambiguous and open to different interpretations, and point toward a need for further research?

Remember.....synthesising the literature...

- A single piece of research cannot just be considered on its own
- Important to view the piece in its relation to a broader picture
- Your research study can be viewed as a piece of a mosaic – the pattern only emerges when standing and looking at the mosaic as a whole



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Remember this for all of your assignments!



NB: Critical appraisal of your
research!

Discussion: Critically analysing your own work!

- What were your key findings?
- How do these relate to the aims of your study i.e., what are the implications of these findings for theory and practice (where appropriate)
- How robust are these findings? Methodological considerations/limitations
- Which theories/literature do your findings provide support for? Which ones do they not support? Why?
- Where should research go next?