

Guideline for Reporting Action Research

Japanese Society of Health Education and Promotion

1. Action research and its meaning

1.1 What is Action Research?

There is no single, universally accepted definition of Action Research (AR). The term encompasses several research methods referred to as Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), Action Research, or Participatory (Action) Research¹⁻⁴). In this guideline, research that meets the following four conditions is defined as AR^{5,6}).

- (1) “Research activities” and “action” aimed at solving problems in the fields.
- (2) “Participatory research” in which researchers engage with people in the field.
- (3) “Democratic activities” carried out collaboratively with people in the field.
- (4) “Activities that influence and transform organizations and society,” not merely producing academic outcomes.

1.2 Significance of AR

In previous studies intervening in communities^{*1}, activities were often researcher-driven. Consequently, many initiatives faced limitations in sustainability, such as difficulty sustaining the activities beyond the research period. AR, by prioritizing the perspectives, needs, and wisdom of those in the field, promotes community empowerment and enhances the sustainability of activities that influence and bring about change in society. Furthermore, by publishing initiatives based on AR, it becomes possible to disseminate these outcomes to other academic institutions and communities.

*1: In this guideline, “community” refers broadly to groups formed not only by geographical context but also by systems, shared concerns, virtual spaces, or populations targeted by common policies⁷). Examples include local areas (municipalities, districts, etc.), workplaces (businesses, departments, etc.), patient groups, and self-help groups.

1.3 Purpose of this guideline

AR holds significant value both in practice and academia. However, because its methods—including researcher involvement, content, evaluation, and reporting—differ from traditional hypothesis-testing empirical research, publishing it as a paper presents various challenges (especially as an original article). Given the limited number of published AR studies, guidelines are needed to help authors report appropriately and to assist editorial board members and reviewers in making sound judgments. Therefore, this guideline aims to present the items that should be included and their content when preparing action research for publication.

While this guideline is intended for publication in the Japanese Journal of Health Education and

Promotion, it was developed with the aim of also serving as a reference for publication in other academic journals.

2. Types of Papers

Like other research, AR papers are categorized as original articles, practice reports, short communications, or other types depending on novelty, content, and length. Specific types should follow the submission guidelines.

Since AR often follows different processes and methods from conventional research, it is frequently published as a practice report rather than an original article. However, many AR studies may also be suitable for original articles depending on their content. When publishing AR as an original article, it is desirable to structure the paper according to this guideline, incorporating the IMRAD format (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion). Papers may also report the research process, describe the planning stage prior to implementation (protocol papers), or present a portion of the activities. Even in such cases, refer to “4. Structure and Required Content.”

3. Precautions for Implementation

3.1 Ethical Considerations

Where necessary, ethical considerations should be addressed based on relevant guidelines such as the Ethical Guidelines for Medical and Health Research Involving Human Subjects. Although ethical review prior to research commencement is desirable, if research is already underway or conducted as part of an administrative project, necessary procedures should be undertaken as appropriate. In AR, planned activities may change based on participants’ intentions. If changes occur, amendments to ethical approval should be submitted as necessary. When submitting a practice report, refer to relevant ethical guidelines provided by the journal.

3.2 Authorship

Authorship should follow regulations such as those of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) ⁸⁾. AR involves not only researchers but many stakeholders, and participants are also research collaborators. Therefore, authorship should ideally be determined at the start of the research or at least at the beginning of manuscript preparation.

3.3 Data Management and Intellectual Property

All research-related data, including qualitative data such as field notes, should be managed appropriately. Data management should comply with institutional regulations. If intellectual property issues may arise, written agreements should be established prior to the research.

3.4 Conflict of Interest

Any conflicts of interest (COI) should be declared in accordance with submission guidelines.

4. Structure and Required Content

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Background

Describe the social context, prior research (what is known), and gaps in knowledge (what is not known). A definition of AR used in the study may also be provided.

4.1.2 Problem

State the problem the study aims to solve. Describe underlying societal issues where relevant. Explain why AR was chosen and its advantages.

4.1.3 Purpose

State the purpose (goal) of the research. Also describe any intended impact on organizations or society.

4.1.4 Other

If theories or models are used, mention them.

4.2 Methods

4.2.1 Participants ^{*2}

Describe participant characteristics and organizational context. Identification is desirable where possible; otherwise, provide demographic information.

*2: In conventional research/activities (hypothesis-testing, researcher-led), the term “subjects” is generally used. In action research, “participants” are partners who collaborate with the researcher, participating in all stages of the research/activity. Depending on the degree and nature of their involvement in the research/activity, some individuals or groups may be described as ‘stakeholders’ or “subjects.”

4.2.2 Action Process

Describe how partnerships were formed, how researchers engaged, and how participants were involved. Include period, content of activities, and scope of participation. If multiple phases exist, describe them chronologically⁹⁾. Figures may be used for clarity.

Planned activities are described in Methods, while actual implementation is described in Results.

4.2.3 Analysis Methods

Use qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods as appropriate.

- Process evaluation assesses participation and implementation.
- Output evaluation assesses activity outputs.
- Outcome evaluation assesses achievement of objectives.
- Outcome evaluation may not always be conducted.

Use established tools where possible and ensure rigor through triangulation.

4.2.4 Ethical Considerations

Report ethical approval details.

4.2.5 Other

Describe theoretical frameworks, funding sources, and how participant involvement influenced the research ¹⁰.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Activities

Describe activities conducted, timing, participation, and deviations from the plan.

4.3.2 Evaluation

Present qualitative and quantitative results appropriately. Include community responses, empowerment, and social impact. Partnership evaluation may be included.

4.4 Discussion

4.4.1 Interpretation

Summarize findings and discuss whether objectives were achieved.

4.4.2 Strengths and Limitations

Discuss strengths and limitations, including participant influence.

4.4.3 Transferability ^{*3}

Discuss applicability to other contexts and conditions required.

*3: In conventional research/activities (hypothesis-testing or researcher-led), the term “generalization” is used. In AR, “transferability” is used to mean whether the findings can be adapted or replicated in other communities.

4.4.4 Implications

Discuss implications for policy or research without overinterpretation.

4.5 Conclusion

State conclusions aligned with objectives. Avoid including broader implications or future research.

4.6 References

Follow submission guidelines.

4.7 Other

Include acknowledgments and COI disclosures. Because action research involves multiple stakeholders

beyond the listed authors, appropriate acknowledgment of contributions is encouraged. Care should be taken to avoid identifying communities when anonymity is required.

References

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- 9) Smith L, Rosenzweig L, Schmidt M. Best practices in the reporting of participatory action research: Embracing both the forest and the trees. *Counseling Psychologist* 2010; 38(8): 1115–1138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000010376416>
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