

Interactive comment on “The use of semi-structured interviews for the characterisation of farmer irrigation practices” by J. O’Keeffe et al.

K. Waylen

kerry.waylen@hutton.ac.uk

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Your work has collected some interesting information, but I believe you have made inappropriate reference to the work as "qualitative", and this weakens the credibility of the study.

Qualitative scientific research has a different epistemological basis, and its relevance, credibility and quality are constituted quite differently to research that follows the quantitative paradigm. This affects everything from the research questions to the design and analysis of qualitative research projects. As an example, the issue of sampling: the sampling approach for semi-structured interviews does not aim to achieve a representative sample of a general population (e.g. using random sampling), instead a

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smaller number of in-depth carefully conducted interviews are carried out with interviewees usually purposively selected to understand key aspects of the range, whilst the resulting data would then be carefully analysed (not using statistics) to disentangle and explain the patterns between issues.

So, I suggest this work must not be presented as qualitative. As far as I can tell you have used an approach to understanding the problem, sampling and data analysis that is consistent with the quantitative positivistic sciences: so I suggest you simply present it as such, and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your work in these terms. (Linked to this, I suggest your data collection approach might better described as a survey administered in person/ face-to-face, rather than as semi-structured interviews.) Taking this approach won't preclude you from discussing any additional insights that you uncovered through the survey, or any issues that you can't analyse using statistics, but it will mean that they are better contextualised and you won't be judged as over/misclaiming by any social scientists who read your work.

I hope that makes sense and is helpful, good luck with the work.

P.S. If you would like to read more about the differences between quantitative and qualitative research approaches, some accessible sources are: * Snape, D., and L. Spencer. 2003. The foundations of qualitative research. Pages 1-23 in J. Ritchie and J. Lewis, editors. Qualitative Research Practice. Sage Publications Ltd, London, UK. * Creswell, J. W. 2005. Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Sage, London, UK.

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