

# Review of: "Data Interpretation in Social Research: a Guide to Standardising Research Outcomes And Outcome Evaluation"

Francesco Domenico d'Ovidio<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Bari

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The problem of data interpretation is treated here, and particularly in section 3, from an almost 'philosophical' point of view, with which I fully agree: "the presentation of raw data is not data interpretation".

From a practical point of view, however, it should be better emphasised that the presentation of the data and their description and explanation is an indispensable prerequisite for interpretation: for example, one cannot interpret the relationship measures in Figure 3 if it is not clear to the reader what those data mean, or interpret the network in Figure 6 if the reader is not told what those arrows, those boxes, in short, what those graphic elements are and what they indicate. This, in fact, is the sense of what is specified in section 3.2: "interpretation" can also be defined as the process of conceptual synthesis that follows the process of data analysis, just as from the analysis of a series of diagnostic examinations the medical specialist derives the interpretation of disease and treatment.

Willig said: "the term 'analysis' invokes something sober and systematic, an activity that is carried out by technical experts who approach their work with objectivity, rigour and attention to detail. [...] By contrast, 'interpretation' is associated with the arts, with creativity and with the imagination. [...] The language of 'analysis' is associated with science whereas the language of 'interpretation' is associated with arts and humanities". This is a true interpretation of a widespread but false concept, showing how 'vox populi vox Dei' (voice of the people, voice of God) is a simplification that often leads to disaster.

I think the only element on which my agreement is not perfect is (apart from the perhaps excessive articulation of the individual arguments, which disperses attention) the level of standardisation proposed for the interpretation phase: in fact, flexibility is also needed in standardisation, and sometimes the interpretation of the social phenomenon cannot be clearly separated from the data description phase. However, the two phases must always be separated, even when they are almost simultaneous.

This also depends on the context of the research.

All in all, the essay is very interesting and well-written, but would benefit from more synthesis and contextualisation: indeed, this seems to be one of the cases where the interpretive synthesis goes immediately after the analysis of the problem, so as not to risk losing sight of both.

