

My research journey from MSc dissertation to published journal article



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I studied for the MSc Social Research Methods in 2012. My dissertation was a qualitative study of the impact of educational and vocational activities on homeless people's everyday lives. I conducted semi-structured interviews and small scale participant observation at three homeless centres in London and I used thematic analysis to analyse my data. The findings highlight the importance of these activities in helping to restore homeless people's self-efficacy, self-confidence and agency.

When I completed my MSc, my supervisor encouraged me to try and publish my dissertation. Thanks to her expertise and guidance, I began the rather daunting task of turning the dissertation into an academic paper ([Iveson & Cornish, 2015](#)). This is a long and sometimes difficult process but it is also extremely worthwhile and I would also encourage masters students to consider publishing.

I learned a lot whilst working on the article and I am now putting this knowledge to good use whilst I prepare my first PhD publication. I would suggest some key things to bear in mind when considering publication. My supervisor and I agreed to co-author the paper. This was an important decision for me. I had no experience in academic publishing and probably wouldn't have had the confidence to take the dissertation any further without her support.

Firstly, identify a journal that 'fits' with your research and look at some of its recent publications and writing styles. Whereas a dissertation is writer-centred, a journal article needs to be punchy, reader-centred and argument-driven. Everything you include should be directly relevant to your argument so be prepared to be ruthless and trim or remove a lot of superfluous material whilst preserving the substance. This is not an easy task and I agonised over losing large chunks of my work that had taken me so long to write.

The publication process can take a long time – it took me just under 12 months (this could be a lot longer depending on the journal) from first submission to early view publication so be prepared to update any statistics you may have included. Make sure you critically engage fully with the relevant literature; again, you may need to review what has been published since you wrote your dissertation and include some new references. When reworking your paper, try and cite other authors who have also recently published in your chosen journal. This demonstrates an understanding of your particular field and will increase your credibility. Be prepared for disappointment and frustration if your article is rejected by a journal. It is also very rare not to be asked to revise and resubmit. However, reviewers'

comments ultimately improve the quality of your article and you should follow all the suggestions put forward by them and the editor (unless there is a very good reason not to). Have patience and persevere!

Finally, I would like to reflect on the impact of publishing. The research I undertook for my dissertation was with homeless people, a vulnerable and marginalised group, and I felt a strong responsibility to make the results public and accessible. In order to further disseminate my research and engage with non-academic audiences, I produced a report for the homeless centres I worked with and have now also circulated the finished article. I know from recent contact with one of the centres that they are under continued pressure from funding cuts and I feel that I have at least been able to provide them with some potentially useful research that may help them with their argument against these cuts.

Academic journals though often have a limited audience and I would be naïve to think that my article will have any immediate impact on homeless policy. However, getting published is important for other reasons; it is an indication of the quality of a piece of research and that the journal's review board consider it will make a useful contribution to the literature. Publishing an article is a challenge, but a very rewarding one. It can build your reputation within your discipline and help you develop as both a writer and as a researcher. And when you finally get your article accepted, it is an amazing sense of achievement.

Mandie Iveson is a graduate of the MSc Social Research Methods, and is currently a PhD student at the University of Roehampton.

Iveson, M., and Cornish, F. (2015) Re-building Bridges: Homeless People's Views on the Role of Vocational and Educational Activities in Their Everyday Lives. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, doi: [10.1002/casp.2262](https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2262).

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