

INPLASY

Systematic review to inform development of a quality appraisal tool for mock jury research (KJR-QAT)

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Support - None.

Review Stage at time of this submission - The review has not yet started.

Conflicts of interest - There are no conflicts of interest in relation to this research project. This MRes study, titled Development of a Quality Appraisal Tool for Jury Decision-Making Research, is conducted independently as part of academic requirements within the school of medicine at the University of East Anglia. No financial, institutional, or personal interests are associated with the design, analysis, or reporting of this project.

The project does not receive any external or internal funding and relies solely on secondary data from publicly available sources. The primary supervisor provides academic guidance but has no vested interest in specific outcomes or conclusions.

The purpose of this research is to improve transparency and methodological consistency within jury decision-making research, rather than to promote or validate any pre-existing tool or theoretical position. All findings and interpretations will be reported objectively, in accordance with ethical and scientific integrity standards.

INPLASY registration number: INPLASY2025110062

Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 20 November 2025 and was last updated on 20 November 2025.

INTRODUCTION

Review question / Objective This review aims to identify, evaluate, and synthesise the methodological features that define the quality of jury decision-making research, with the ultimate goal of developing a structured quality appraisal tool specifically tailored to this domain. The central research question is:

“What methodological practices and considerations are clear markers of study quality and validity in jury decision-making research, and how can these criteria be used to create a reliable quality appraisal tool?”

Specific objectives are:

1. To conduct a systematic review of literature discussing methodological quality, validity, and reliability in jury decision-making studies.

2. To extract and synthesise the key criteria used to assess methodological quality across existing research.
3. To integrate these criteria into a structured, pilot-tested draft of the Kia Jury Research Quality Appraisal Tool (KJR-QAT).
4. To refine the tool through pilot application to a sample of mock-jury and simulated-jury studies.
5. To apply the finalised tool across a larger dataset, including a focused analysis of studies involving defendants with mental health conditions.
6. To produce evidence-based recommendations for future jury simulation research design, validity, and reporting transparency.

This review therefore bridges methodological and applied psychology, aiming to strengthen the interpretability of evidence within research.

Rationale Understanding how juries reach decisions provides valuable insight into human reasoning, group dynamics, and the impact of evidence presentation. However, because legislation across many jurisdictions (including here in the UK) often prohibits direct observation or study of real juries, researchers rely on mock or simulated jury studies. These studies vary considerably in design, realism, sampling, and measurement, leading to inconsistent methodological quality across the field.

Recent work by Holmes & Beazley (2025) highlighted these issues in their systematic review of mock-juror experiments involving defendants with mental health conditions. Their review found wide variation in sampling methods, the types of mental health evidence presented, and how outcomes such as verdicts or sentencing decisions were measured. Despite using the AXIS appraisal tool to assess quality, Holmes and Beazley observed that this instrument failed to capture key methodological aspects specific to jury research. They concluded that although existing studies offer valuable insights, the lack of a domain-specific quality appraisal framework limits the comparability and interpretability of findings.

Building on this, the current project aims to address that methodological gap by developing a dedicated quality appraisal tool tailored to jury decision-making research. By systematically identifying methodological criteria across the literature, the new tool will promote greater consistency, transparency, and rigour in evaluating this type of research. This is particularly relevant in subfields such as studies involving mental health evidence, where methodological differences may explain inconsistent findings more than genuine juror bias. In doing so, the project extends Holmes

& Beazley's work and contributes to improving the reliability of psychological evidence used to understand juror decision-making.

Condition being studied This review does not address a clinical condition but focuses on the methodological quality of jury decision-making research. Specifically, it analyses studies examining how mock jurors or simulated juries evaluate evidence, reach verdicts, and are influenced by psychological, social, or contextual factors. This includes analysing studies such as Holmes and Beazley's review, which highlight methodological issues in the field and make explicit recommendations for improving the rigour and quality of future jury research.

A key context of this review involves studies presenting mental health-related evidence (e.g., defendants with schizophrenia, depression, or personality disorders). Research has shown that juror perceptions in these cases are often shaped by stigma and stereotypes (Mossièrè & Maeder, 2015). However, methodological weaknesses, such as unrealistic trial stimuli or unrepresentative samples, make it difficult to determine whether findings reflect genuine juror attitudes of poor study design.

Therefore, this review examines the "condition" of methodological quality and validity in the literature rather than a health condition per se. By systematically identifying methodological strengths and weaknesses, it will enable more accurate interpretation of juror behaviour research and support improvements in the design of future experimental studies.

METHODS

Search strategy A comprehensive systematic search will be conducted across major psychology and interdisciplinary databases, including APA PsycInfo, ScienceDirect, PubMed, and the UEA Online Library.

Search terms will combine controlled vocabulary and keywords related to jury decision-making and methodological quality, such as:

("jur*" decision-making" OR "mock jur*" OR "jury simulation" OR "mock trial") AND ("validity" OR "methodology" OR "research design" OR "quality" OR "ecological validity"). AND "recommend"

Searches will be limited to English-language articles published between 1990 and 2025.

We will then search the reference lists of included papers.

Inclusion criteria:

- Primary quantitative research studies, systematic reviews, editorials, or professional opinion pieces that discuss or make recommendations about methodological design, validity, or study quality in jury decision-making or mock-jury research.
- Studies published in peer-reviewed journals.
- Quantitative studies involving any population of mock jurors (e.g., students, community members, or mixed samples), as well as reviews or editorial/opinion pieces that make methodological recommendations for such studies.
- Relevant book chapters may also be included where access is available and where they are cited within an included peer-reviewed journal article.

Exclusion criteria:

- Studies not published in peer-reviewed journals (including unpublished theses, dissertations, reports, or website content).
- Studies that do not offer future-focused recommendations or statements that can be translated into methodological good-practice points for appraising jury decision-making research.
- Studies unrelated to jury decision-making or broader group decision-making contexts.
- Non-English language sources.

Screening and Extraction

Titles and abstracts will first be screened for relevance. Full-text articles meeting the inclusion criteria will then be examined in detail. Data will be extracted into a structured Excel sheet capturing the following information:

Key Study Characteristics

- Study details: author, year, country.
- Study type: primary research, systematic review, editorial, opinion piece, or professional recommendation.
- Primary research studies: design type (e.g., mock trial, simulated trial, written summary, filmed/live materials); sample characteristics (e.g., sample size, recruitment method, demographic information); key research questions; nature and realism of trial materials; measurement of dependent variables.
- Systematic reviews: review focus; number of included studies; key inclusion criteria; quality appraisal tool(s) used.
- Editorials/opinion pieces: context of the paper and a brief summary of methodological arguments or recommendations.

In addition, all studies will be reviewed for reported methodological strengths, limitations, and recommendations.

Categorisation of Methodological Recommendations

Each methodological recommendation will be coded into one of the following a-priori provisional categories, which may be merged or refined as analysis progresses:

- Participant recruitment and sampling
- Development and validity of material content (including alignment with real jury experience)
- Randomisation procedures
- Manipulation procedures and nature of manipulation
- Participant flow and procedural realism
- Procedures to promote engagement and attention
- Procedures to assess engagement and attention
- Responses to engagement problems, dropout, or attrition
- Choice and selection of independent variables
- Measurement of dependent variables (including alignment with real decision-making processes)
- Statistical analysis
- Reporting of findings
- Material availability
- Data availability

These categories were developed deductively, drawing on prior research experience in the field (e.g., Holmes & Beazley, 2025) and informed by the structure of existing quality appraisal frameworks such as AXIS. They will be refined as the review develops to ensure they remain aligned with the patterns emerging from the literature.

Item-Level Scoring

Each item within the developing appraisal tool will be rated using the following scale:

- N – Not assessable: The reported data do not allow the item to be evaluated.
- 0 – Poor: The item appears neglected or likely to undermine quality or generalisability.
- 1 – Some attention given: The item is acknowledged but with remaining concerns about quality or generalisability.
- 2 – Good: The item is addressed clearly, with no major concerns.
- 3 – Exemplar: The item is addressed exceptionally well and represents a model of good practice.

Narrative Synthesis

The narrative synthesis will focus on developing concrete anchor points and clear scoring guidance for each methodological category. This will involve identifying recurring themes, highlighting examples of good practice, and translating recommendations into specific criteria for the KJR-QAT.

For each type of paper, the following will be extracted:

- Primary research: key methodological limitations acknowledged by authors; specific recommendations for future studies.
- Systematic reviews: common methodological weaknesses across the field; recommendations for improving research quality.
- Editorials/opinion pieces: conceptual or practical recommendations for strengthening methodological rigour.

A narrative and thematic synthesis approach will be used to integrate these insights and establish the methodological domains that will form the foundation of the KJR-QAT.

Participant or population All information will be drawn from previously published research studies. The reviewed studies themselves typically include mock or simulated jurors, such as university students, community volunteers, or jury-eligible adults. However, this project only analyses the published findings and methodological details of those studies. No new participants will be recruited or contacted at any stage.

Intervention No intervention is necessary. Experimental projects will of course have a manipulation of some kind and therefore an intervention group but we do not need to define this for the purposes of this review.

Comparator No comparator is necessary. Experimental projects will of course have a manipulation of some kind and therefore a comparison group but we do not need to define this for the purposes of this review.

Study designs to be included Experimental, and correlational studies involving mock or simulated juries; systematic and narrative reviews reviewing these types of studies, or editorials and opinion pieces discussing methodological issues in jury research. Please see above.

Eligibility criteria

Inclusion criteria:

- Primary quantitative research studies, systematic reviews, editorials, or professional opinion pieces that discuss or make recommendations about methodological design, validity, or study quality in jury decision-making or mock-jury research.
- Studies published in peer-reviewed journals.
- Quantitative studies involving any population of mock jurors (e.g., students, community members, or mixed samples), as well as reviews or editorial/opinion pieces that make methodological recommendations for such studies.

- Relevant book chapters may also be included where access is available and where they are cited within an included peer-reviewed journal article.

Information sources Electronic databases: APA PsycInfo, ScienceDirect, PubMed, and UEA Library resources.

Grey literature (e.g., unpublished theses) will not be included due to limited accessibility and uncertain status in relation to methodologic recommendations. Reference lists of eligible studies will be manually screened to identify additional relevant articles. Book chapters cited within included papers will be included if they meet other inclusion criteria.

Electronic databases as described above, primarily peer reviewed journal articles, but we will also review any key book chapters where these are cited within a peer-reviewed article.

We do not plan to search grey literature beyond this.

If a full text cannot be identified or sourced locally, or if a key point about a methodological opinion or recommendation is unclear or conflicting with other information, we may contact relevant authors to assess this. However this will depend on progress and timescale.

Main outcome(s) The main outcome is the identification of core methodological quality domains in jury decision-making research, leading to the development of the KJR-QAT.

Outcomes include:

- Frequency and consistency of methodological features (e.g., sampling, ecological validity, measurement reliability).
- Development of a structured rating scale.
- Application of the tool across studies to assess methodological quality patterns.

Additional outcome(s) N/A.

Data management All records will be managed using Microsoft Excel for screening, data extraction, and synthesis. Each record will include bibliographic details, inclusion decisions, and extracted methodological features.

We will likely use a reference manager such as Mendeley for de-duplication and elements of the screening process. This will partly depend on the number of studies being screened which is currently unknown.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis The quality of included studies will be appraised using the newly developed KJR-QAT, benchmarked against existing tools such as AXIS in a further study. The tool will assess domains including sampling, ecological validity, measurement reliability, and reporting transparency. A pilot test on 10 studies will refine criteria before full application. Each domain will be rated on a three-point scale (low, moderate, high). Two reviewers (the author and supervisor) will independently apply the tool to assess inter-rater reliability.

Strategy of data synthesis A narrative and thematic synthesis will be used. Extracted methodological criteria will be grouped into recurring domains (e.g., sampling, realism, ethics). These domains will form the basis for constructing the KJR-QAT.

Subgroup analysis N/A.

Sensitivity analysis N/A.

Language restriction Yes - English only.

Country(ies) involved United Kingdom.

Other relevant information Additional authors with wider expertise may be added to support with screening and subject matter expertise but these people have not been identified yet.

Keywords Jury decision-making; mock jurors; methodological quality; validity; appraisal tool; forensic psychology; systematic review.

Dissemination plans Peer reviewed publication followed by further pilot testing and publication.

Contributions of each author

Author 1 - Peter Beazley - Primary supervisor, has reviewed all answered above and created the INPLASY entry on behalf of the research team.

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Author 2 - Melissa Kia - Will be the primary researcher for this study and has drafted the answers to the questions above.

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