Reviewer's report

Title: Mapping of health system functions to target capacity strengthening of high priority public health programs. The case of maternal health in Mexico.

Version: 1 Date: 11 October 2010

Reviewer: Walter Mazzucco

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The paper is an interesting proposal about the use of Concept Mapping method for qualitative research in the framework of public health policy, particularly regarding maternal health in Mexico.

However, there are some aspects that need to be clarified. The following comments include some suggestions that have to be implemented in order to consider the manuscript for eventual publication.

MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS

1. Although it is stated by BMC Public Health guidelines that there are no limits about the paper's length, in order to better involve the readers and improve the text comprehension, it is strongly required to review the article’s style, that has to be much more concise and schematic. In fact, this is one of the principal limitations for a scientific paper and has to be preliminary corrected for a complete revision of the present paper.

Particularly, if on one side the study presents several results, on the other an excessive length (in term of considerations and citations) is dedicated to background and methods sections, making the setting confused.

Furthermore, the same consideration is valid for the presented findings: even if there’s not restriction about the quantity of data reporting in a paper, the use of more than four tables, on reviewer’s opinion, is not to be encouraged. This suggestion is in line with some of the advantages offered by concept mapping: reducing the volume of the data, displaying linkages and facilitating cross group or site comparisons. Author should present the principal results and attach the remaining as additional information for the reviewer.

2. The author should also describe the limitations related to disadvantage of using concept maps in qualitative researches, starting from the complexity that makes it difficult for the reader to determine what concepts are of critical importance and what concepts are of secondary importance.

3. Another limitation of this paper is that the objectives seem not clear along the test (have to be presented in a schematic way), as well as the statistical method adopted that has to be better described.

DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS

1) The authors should consider to better describe the organization of the Mexican
Health System, distinguishing responsibilities and level of competences.

MINOR ESSENZIAL REVISIONS

1) Title page: The corresponding author has to be indicated.

2) Background: This section should end with a very brief statement of what is being reported in the article, so that is better to anticipate the reasons of the choice of maternal mortality as object of study.

3) Methods:
- It is not clear if the Concept Mapping software provides for the correlation’s data shown as well as for the maps. - Give more details about data collection and input, output, software version, statistical tests and methodology used. - References to figures and tables should be inserted in the results section, not here.

4) Results: - Limit to report the principal finding, highlighting the most significant; comment it in the discussion section. - Many findings reported in the text are discordant respect of the same represented in tables (Tables 4 to 6); the more, data related to the “position in the map” are not intelligible.

5) Discussion: - The comments related to Table 7 refer to findings not previous described inside the results’ section. Anyway, consider the importance of those data in the general balance of the article. - There is little comparison of the results of this study with other studies, if there are any of interest.

6) Figure 1: A detailed, but concise, legend should follow, in order to better explain how to read the maps in term of: level of consensus, level of priority, level of importance, level of association, etc..

7) Table 1: It is redundant respect of what already reported in the text.

8) Table 2a and 2b: consider joining the two tables.

9) Tables 4, 5 and 6: The way of finding representation is not clear as the “position in the map” is undefined. - Tables should have a title that summarizes the whole table, composed by a maximum of 15 words: review Table 6 title.

10) Table 7: There’s no correspondence between percentages represented along the text and in the table (for example: 25% for the “Human resource function”).

11) The paper should be implemented with a list of the abbreviation used (R1= function A, etc.).

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.