Reviewer's report

Title: New directions in evidence-based policy research: a critical analysis of the literature

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Reviewer: Marianna Fotaki

Reviewer's report:

I would like to commend the authors of this paper for addressing an important and timely issue concerning the role of the evidence based (EBP) policy research in relation to policy making in a fresh and practical manner. The paper is clearly written and well reasoned, and the arguments offered and are well-balanced. The authors identify the dominant strands in EBP research and evaluate them carefully against their strengths and weaknesses (the table summarising the findings of major reviews is very useful). Importantly, they also dispel various preconceptions such as the erroneous belief of policy makers not relying on research evidence and common misconceptions regarding the linear influence of evidence on the policy process. However, I was particularly impressed with the future directions of research in this area that the authors propose. There is indeed an acute need for plural methodologies including ethnographic, experimental and narrative to the study of the impact of evidence on policy processes and multiple theoretical frames for better understanding its complexity (e.g. interpretative, phenomenological and psychosocial -see the work of Yanow, Greenhalgh and my own - Fotaki, 2010 why policies fail so often? Published in Organization). This, along with the necessity to expand on how organisational structures and diverse institutional settings may impact on both, policy formulation and implementation (that is alluded to but not sufficiently elaborated) and how this influences what counts as evidence/or policy failure, would be my only recommendations for the authors to take on board when revising the paper. This needs not to be an extensive reference but rather an acknowledgement of potential approaches and directions that future research could take, which shouldn't be too difficult to introduce.

Many congratulations on producing a succinct and insightful contribution on this important issue!

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

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