Reviewer's report

Title: Trends of public health research output from India 2001-2008

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Reviewer: Zulfiqar A Bhutta

Reviewer's report:

This is an important and interesting study evaluating public health research outputs from India. The data presented are interesting and while suggestive of improved public health outputs from India over the last 5-6 years, still reveal huge gaps in comparison with other developing countries.

My major comments relate to the methodology employed for this comparative review which quite rightly, had to include what was done previously. However, since this survey also sets the current benchmarks for future evaluation, there are a number of issues that merit explanation.

1. The survey explicitly seems to exclude collaborative research because of the restriction of the first author’s affiliation. I am uncertain why additional criteria such as the subject and collaborating centers were not considered? To illustrate, many would regard Parbhat Jha’s and colleague’s work on smoking and relation to mortality (NEJM 2008) as one of the most important public health outputs from India in recent years. That would have been excluded using the criteria used by Dandona et al. Additionally, irrespective of the first author stipulation for the outputs, why not also include corresponding authors?

2. Although stated, the methodology employed for a broader search of the grey literature is unclear. Was this a systematic search using key words and which major search engines were used?

3. The quality rating score rates are skewed as anything exceeding reasonable standards was scored as “excellent or near ideal”. Why was a more standard distribution not used?

4. Any particular reason why IndMed did not have the abstracts for 2007?

5. The classification of papers has followed the previously described categories but some of these categories could be improved. For example many would quibble at including maternal health as a subset of reproductive health as seems to have been done?

There are a few other interesting things that one would like to know

6. What proportion of these papers was published in Indian journals? Did the authors attempt to obtain citation indices for these papers?

7. What is the evidence that any of these papers influenced policy or even evidence that commissioned research from ministries was linked to subsequent action?
Which journal?: Not appropriate for BMC Medicine: an article of only archival interest, but might be suited to BMC Public Health

What next?: Offer publication in BMC Public Health after minor essential revisions

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

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