Reviewer’s report

Title: Institutional capacity to generate and use evidence in LMICs: current state and opportunities for HPSR

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Reviewer: Fabio Zicker

Reviewer’s report:

It is an informative article that brings together the two sides of HPSR - generation and use of research evidence. However, the text is somehow long and repetitive, since, in addition to specific literature review and discussion sections, the results presentation is combined with specific review/discussion. I would suggest that a reduced focused version of the manuscript be prepared, including summary boxes and perhaps eliminating the figures, which are already sufficiently described in the text. If the current manuscript format is kept, I suggest that the "results" section be named "results and discussion" and the "discussion" section named "recommendations", which would also include the conclusion paragraphs.

Some specific suggestions for improvement:

Introduction

* The initial reference to the Ebola epidemic, Universal Health Coverage, weak national health systems and HPSR is very superficial and it needs further elaboration. It seems HPSR would be the single solution for stronger and responsive public health systems.

* Box 1 can be replaced by a paragraph with specific reference.

* The title "What are institutions?" could be replaced by "Institutional capacity for HPSR"

* Literature review - please provide information on how the literature review and search were conducted. Summarize the key issues/topics discussed, perhaps in a box.

* The conceptual framework proposed by JHU is mentioned in detail, but not used as a framework to build the review. Is this description necessary for the paper - would a brief reference be enough?

Data source and methods

* To whom were survey invitations addressed to and who responded the questionnaires (Directors, PIs, departments, programmes, etc.)?
* What type of institutions/organization/initiatives were invited?

* Is the questionnaire form provided as supplementary material?

* The survey seems to describe the conditions/processes for knowledge generation, but not for the actual production of new knowledge/evidence for policy. Was the HPSRP institutional experience/production assessed in any way?

* Who were the respondents? Discuss representativeness/comparison between the 481 institutions invited and the 110 responders. Were the responders the most active in HPSR? What is a institution questionnaire with "valid responses"?

* How were the key components of the institution questionnaire defined? Was there a correlation or complementarity between the institution survey and the MOH survey?

* What was the criteria for selecting the 39 MOH?

Results

* Did all the seven largest LMIC mentioned responded to the questionnaire? Could you describe the characteristics of responders and non-responders?

* What is a MOH questionnaire with "valid responses"?

* Was there any research institution and MOH responders from the same country? Any consensus or conflict opinions between the replies?

* Most of the questions/replies revealed constrains for knowledge generation and use of HPSR. Was there an assessment of factors facilitating successful cases of knowledge generation and use?

* Despite funding, would you highlight any particular difference between HIC and LMIC research institutions with regard to the interest in or conditions for HPSR?

* How were the key components of the MOH questionnaire defined? Is the MOH questionnaire form provided as supplementary material?

* Give denominators for table 1.

* Summarize the key issues addressed in the MOH survey in a box, for easy reference.

* Were there any conflictive, competitive or complementary replies between the institution and MOH surveys?
* Did the authors identify any particular subject area/field of most interest for HPSR among the institutions and MOH surveyed?

Discussion and conclusion

* The issue of engaging stakeholders is highlighted in the conclusion, although it was not sufficiently addressed in the review.

* One important area that could be further addressed is the actual translation/implementation of evidence into policy and practice. Although all the recommendations would offer a conducive environment for improving the supply and demand for HPSR, the translation process and the mechanisms for the implementation of research evidences are not sufficiently discussed.

* One additional aspects for discussion is how HPSR could inform implementation research needs and design in public health.

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