Reviewer’s report

Title: Contextually tailored interventions can increase evidence-informed policymaking on health-enhancing physical activity: The experiences of two Danish municipalities

Version: 0 Date: 14 Nov 2017

Reviewer: Diana Schow

Reviewer’s report:

General Comments

Thank you for submitting this article, which stands to add to the knowledge base regarding policy processes. Policymaking is a critical, and often overlooked, consideration when attempting to improve health program outputs and outcomes. With a major revision, this article can make a strong contribution to the field.

The REPOPA project is very important and deserves recognition as a mover in the area of applied policymaking research. The article loses touch with this foundation in many sections. Much information about REPOPA is not adequately brought forward from previously published work, which describes important details. Throughout the text, there is a sense of needing more explanation about what things mean and why they are done. The concept of knowledge use deserves a deeper explanation. The article should stand on its own in this regard and not be so dependent on its predecessor.

In relation to qualitative data, there is a lack of description about how the qualitative interviews, conducted during the needs assessment, informed the results of research in terms of the main hypothesis and change over time. From my count, more than half of the qualitative evidence used in Table 4 comes from these interviews. Can you clarify if Table 4 information was used to support conclusions about mean Likert scores and changes in those scores in addition to being analyzed separately? How was the use of qualitative interviews different from the use of qualitative responses on the questionnaires?

The flow of logic in the article would benefit from drawing a clearer line between results in the Results section and the exact data that was used to get to those results. As each result is discussed connect it to the exact place in Table 3 or Table 4 that it came from. Possibly number items in the tables to help this process along.

Comments by Section

Abstract
The phrase "seemed to facilitate the use of knowledge in the municipalities" is more ambiguous than it needs to be. Consider speaking directly to changes that can confidently be reported on (e.g. respondents reported that use of knowledge changed in three ways…)

The phrase "back to baseline at 12 months," contradicts findings in the Results: "even if an increase was seen after the interventions, there was a minor drop during the 12-month follow up, though mostly not to the pre-intervention level."

Background

Paragraph 2 - I strongly suggest including reference to historical context and/or trauma as a necessary driver of public health interventions.

Methods

Paragraph 2 - The Stewardship approach is referenced. It would help to list the specific elements of the approach that theoretically guided the interventions.

Paragraph 3 - It is mentioned that the pre-intervention study is explained elsewhere, but to make it clear how it is relevant to this article, it really needs to be explained how the results from the pre-intervention study informed the development of the intervention that is being assessed in this article. Without this explanation, it is unclear why the intervention was used and how it is connected to the hypothesis that "a combination of approaches could enhance close interaction between the main stakeholders..." It is also unclear why the two communities that were studied were selected.

In Bertram et al. (2016) terms like "transparency" are used. That article also states that the interventions aimed to secure close interaction between policy makers and target groups. These are extremely important details that this article would really benefit from including (see my comment below about your finding that one respondent questioned the need to include citizens).

Settings, policies and participants

Explain that Kolding and Varde are two of six interventions from the original study. What were their specific needs that led to the tailoring of the interventions?

It is stated that policy interventions were used to help "facilitate the use of knowledge in the policy processes." This suggests that the researchers did control the process. This section states that the researchers did not control the process. It would help to clarify exactly what the researchers did and did not control.

Implementation process
Please explain why there are only two of the six original REPOPA (Bertram et al, 2016) organizations selected for this particular study.

Please state which specific model for change was used.

Data and Questionnaires

It would be helpful if the phrase "the questionnaire was designed for an international project" included direct reference to REPOPA. This would orient the reader.

"in the needs assessment" would better read "in the original REPOPA needs assessment," … if I understand it correctly.

How many of the original questions from the questionnaire were used in this paper? Is it possible to attach a list of the exact questions that were analyzed for this study? Table 3 does not adequately explain which responses were related to barriers or successes, for example. The short description in Table 3 does not help me fully understand the questions that were asked.

Data- Qualitative Interviews

It would be good to articulate how data from the qualitative interviews explains research results. What is the connection between qualitative interview data and the results? How many interviews were conducted in Kolding and how many in Varde? Only a total number is given.

Include a reference for content analysis.

Attach a list of the qualitative interview questions and/or describe how they were different from questionnaire questions.

Results

A heading that addresses pre, post and follow-up questionnaires might be helpful to include.

Inclusion of a statement that "all of the following descriptions reference changes in means" would help, if I understand it correctly.

Conceptual Knowledge Use

Instead of using the phrase "seemed to", consider describing what happened. For example: In Kolding, mean scores for collection of internal and external knowledge from stakeholders increased between pre-assessment and 12-month follow-up.

I believe a new heading for the Qualitative Data Results is needed here?

Qualitative Data Results
The results from the qualitative data are very interesting, but it is difficult to make the leap between them and what was learned in terms of how the intervention might have affected knowledge use. A good portion of this data was collected only prior to the intervention, during the needs assessment, so how does it explain any changes in mean scores that were observed, or does it simply suggest what personal experiences were like at the project outset? It would help to clarify this.

Also, this section says some very important things, like, "one informant questioned whether including citizens in policy development would contribute anything." It would be good to reference such important findings in the Discussion section, to highlight where the research could move the field forward.

Assertions made in this section should be accompanied by a citation of the interview (s) or questionnaire (s) from Table 4 that led to the assertions. For example: "the health departments were understood to be more trained and experienced in searching for knowledge" should be followed by (K,pre). It should also state if this was just one person who felt this way or several. Which specific interview number or questionnaire in the community under study did it come from?

The Discussion section mentions differences in results between Kolding and Varde. It would help to clarify this in the Results section as well.

Discussion

It is suggested that there was improvement in organizational procedures for the use of research knowledge. It would help to clarify which data was used to reach this conclusion - was it tied to any of the qualitative results, or just the Likert scale results? Examples would really help. What exact procedures were improved?

The phrase "even if an increase was seen after the interventions, there was a minor drop during the 12-month follow up, though mostly not to the pre-intervention level" is not consistent with the statement in the Abstract that says, "most of the changes were back to baseline."

This section could be strengthened by replacing the word "seemed" with reference to actual results (e.g. "respondents reported that the contextually tailored interventions enhanced EIPM in X number of ways).

Level of interest

Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English

Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:
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