Author’s response to reviews

Title: How are evidence generation partnerships between researchers and policy makers enacted in practice? A qualitative interview study

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Version: 1 Date: 13 Mar 2019

Author’s response to reviews:

12th March 2019

Dear Editors,

Re: "How are evidence generation partnerships between researchers and policy makers enacted in practice? A qualitative interview study" (HRPS-D-18-00245)

Thank you for your recent email regarding our paper. We would also like to thank the reviewers for the helpful suggestions they have made regarding how we might improve our paper. Please find following a detailed outline of how we have addressed each of the suggestions made.
Reviewer #1:
General comments: A very interesting and valuable piece of research conducted by the authors. Thank you for this positive feedback.

1. Main comment is though I can see how the results of this study could be generalisable - it would be good to highlight that the sample was all from New South Wales, Australia (in case there are some structural interactions between researchers and policy makers native to NSW in Aus, which are not transferable to other settings e.g. LMIC etc).
The abstract method and conclusion now state that the key informants were drawn from NSW and our findings thus pertain to that region. This is also now highlighted in the results section of the paper: All participants, with the exception of one researcher, were based in New South Wales, Australia. The themes which emerged from the interview with the participant from outside New South Wales were consistent with those which emerged more broadly (page 6).

And in the limitations section of the discussion:
We acknowledge the limitations inherent in the small sample size utilised here, the fact that most of our participants were from NSW and that our sample was not randomly selected. Indeed, the experiences of these highly practiced individuals may diverge from those of researchers and policy makers who have less experience of participating in research/policy partnerships, or who work in settings where such partnerships are less common. Although many of our findings align with the existing literature, these limitations mean that our findings may not be broadly generalisable (page 21).

2. Abstract:
* Would be good to highlight within the methods bit that key informant interviews were conducted with key informants from the NSW region of Australia and have the conclusions framed in that context. The abstract method and conclusion now state that the key informants were drawn from NSW and our findings thus pertain to that region.

* Would be good to highlight within the results section the different themes that emerged from the interviews as the findings of the study, the current emphasis is more on the Co-production, would be good to see a summary line for research initiated and policy initiated partnerships from Table 1 and 2 also included within the results as well as a short summary line about the answers to (from main body pages 16-18):
o what success in partnerships look like and;
o the components of successful partnerships.
Please see the comments in the methods/ results section for more on this, the abstract results can then mirror that.

As per the reviewer’s suggestion, the results section of the abstract has been amended so as to include findings relevant to each research question.

Results: Researcher-initiated and policy agency-initiated evidence generation partnerships were common. While policy-initiated partnerships were thought to be the most likely to result in impact, researcher-initiated projects were considered important in advancing the science and were favoured by researchers due to greater perceived opportunities to achieve key academic career metrics. Participants acknowledged that levels of collaboration varied widely in research/policy partnerships from minimal to co-production. Co-production was considered a worthy goal by all, conferring a range of benefits, but one that was difficult to achieve in practice. Some participants asserted that the increased time and
resources required for effective co-production meant it was best suited to evaluation and implementation projects where the tacit, experiential knowledge of policy makers provided critical nuance to underpin study design, implementation and analysis. Partnerships that were mutually considered to have produced the desired outcomes were seen to be underpinned by a range of both relationship-based (such as shared aims and goals and trust) and practical factors (such as sound governance and processes).

Main Paper

3. Background: A very thorough background to set the scene for the study.
Thank you for this positive feedback.

Methods/results:
* The methods say that no pre-determined framework was used, and themes were generated inductively. However, the paper also highlights that the research questions were the following:
  1. Why do researchers and policy makers choose to work together? What are the perceived benefits?
  2. How do they work together? Which partnership models are most common?
  3. What are the key a) relationship-based and b) practical components of successful research partnerships?
The results are also broken down into answers to these questions with some additional themes. This makes it unclear what themes finally emerged under which of the research questions. I would propose starting the results section with structuring the results so the reader knows a total of xx themes emerged x for research question 1, y for research question 2 and za and zb for research questions 3a and 3b with the details under that framing.
We have now revised the results section so as to make clearer how many major themes emerged in relation to each research question (pages 7-18).

* It would be good to include the guide for the semi-structured interviews as an appendix/online document to the manuscript
The interview guide is now included as Appendix 1.

Discussion:
* Highlight limitations after the strengths, …the small sample size and location limited to NSW (where the sample is discussed) - and that the conclusions should be framed within that context.
The limitations of our study have now been more fully specified as follows:
We acknowledge the limitations inherent in the small sample size utilised here, the fact that most of our participants were from NSW and that our sample was not randomly selected. Indeed, the experiences of these highly practiced individuals may diverge from those of researchers and policy makers who have less experience of participating in research/policy partnerships, or who work in settings where such partnerships are less common. Although many of our findings align with the existing literature, these limitations mean that our findings may not be broadly generalisable (page 21).

Reviewer #2:
I think this paper is a helpful contribution to an important area of discussion.
Thank you for this positive feedback.
1. I have just two suggestions to strengthen the paper. First, please provide a little more information on the study participants; this will help the reader get a better sense of what universe of experience is being tapped, and to what other settings the findings might possibly be transferable.

More information about participants is now provided on page 7.

Eighteen key informants participated in interviews: 7 were primarily researchers and 11 were currently primarily policy makers. All participating researchers were employed by universities at the Associate Professor or Professor level and had more than fifteen years research experience in public health research. All of the policy makers who participated were employed at Manager level or above by government agencies whose work focussed on health or health-related issues (such as social care). Six of the policy makers had PhDs and/or had previously been employed as researchers and were thus able to bring both a researcher and a policy maker lens to their analysis of research partnerships. All participants, with the exception of one researcher, were based in New South Wales, Australia.

2. Second, and most important, I think it would add to the value of the paper if there were a somewhat deeper and more far-ranging engagement with the existing literature. I trust that the journal can relax its norms with regard to word-limits. Some authors that have bodies of work relevant to this subject include: Russell Glasgow, Igor Rudan, Nancy Cartwright, Ray Pawson, Dean Fixsen, and the SUPPORT group--Oxman, Lavis and Lewin.

Thank you for highlighting these authors, all of whom have made important contributions to the literature. While much of the work of the suggested authors lies outside the scope of the current paper, we now refer to relevant work from these authors throughout the introduction and discussion.

Sincerely,

Anna Williamson on behalf of the authorship team