Reviewer’s report

Title: Hepatitis C virus-related policy-making in Iran: a stakeholder and social network analysis

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Reviewer: Haniye Sajadi

Reviewer's report:

Hepatitis C virus is an important health concern and author/s had conducted a valuable work in this regards. However, there are some issues that it is recommended to address by the author/s as bellow:

Abstract:

1- The aim/s of the study should be stated at the end of the background section.

2- The aim of the study (that has been mentioned in the methods) is "to analyze the roles and characteristics of all stakeholders involved in HCV-related policies in Iran". What do you mean by stakeholders in HCV-related policies? Does it mean those who are involved in policy development? or implementation? or evaluation?

3- It is strongly recommended to explain the methodology in the method section instead of explaining about the aims. The method section needs revision in terms of number of participations, type of participation, the approach used for data analysis, …

4- The results section is very general and doesn't include any relevant findings of the present study. The author/s stated that many stakeholders involved with HCV policy in Iran. It is better to stay for example how many stakeholders are involving in? in which phase of policy making? Or it has stated that "the extent of their participation and support in policy making is different". We know that the extent is different, here we want to know what is this differences, who are stronger? The last sentence, "All HCV policy-making and decision should not be handled by the MOHME alone, but should receive support and advocacy from all stakeholders". Is it your finding? or your conclusion? If it is your findings, it is not clear how to find this? if it is your conclusion, how to come to this?

5- the conclusion section should be re-written. It includes some principals that we know them. It is suggested to show the key messages and implications of the present study in this section.
Introduction:

1- Page 4 (20-21): "Due to lack of ……population (8)"/ page 4 (35-37): "Essentially, ……them". These sentences do not make sense.

2- Reference # 13 has been repeated in two following sentences.

3- The status of current knowledge regarding the importance of stakeholder's analysis for successful implementing of HCV-related policies should be explained in the introduction section.

Method:

1- The author/s defined the stakeholder and explained about the importance of stakeholder's analysis twice (in the background and in the method). There is no need to do this. I suggest they introduce this issue once (in the introduction) and then illustrate a bit more about the methodology you followed in the method section (your study design, time and place of your study, for instance)

2- Page 5 (35): "In the first phase, in-depth interviews were conducted with people involved with the HCV-related program and policies". What does the author/s mean by people? It is better to name them participants or key-informants and then state the number of participant and their positions here.

3- The author/s mentioned that the length of each interview varied between 30 and 45 minutes. Regarding the questions of the interview (asking about the actors and the organizations), the duration of the interview is more than expected time. 30-45 minutes is mainly used for those interviews to investigate the perspectives. I think this study is a part of PhD work and may be asking about the stakeholders is one of the questions of the main topic guide that requires more time to ask.

4- What is the exact difference between "actors" and "the organizations/institutions that are effectively involved in/stakeholders"

5- Use the phase or step for different sections of your methodology.
6- It seems that document analysis has also been used. Is there any added value for this? or for interviews? explain about them if there is any added value.

7- How were the data (interviews and documents) analyzed? by whom?

8- The Ministry of Health and Medical Education is correct for Iran.

9- What do author/s mean by "related organizations" Page 5 (36,37), How many documents were investigated? By whom? How?

10- It is said that participants who had experience and knowledge about HCV-related programs were interviewed. what were your inclusion criteria for experience and knowledge? How many participants took part?

11- Two more tables related to participants and documents characteristics is required to be added.

12- "The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Management and Information of Iran University of Medical Sciences". Put this state at the end of a method or in acknowledgement.

13- Page 5: (35-37): Similar/overlapping data were removed and eventual differences were identified and solved through discussion. What do the author/s mean by this? what overlap? what difference? how were these overlaps and differences solved?

14- Why did the author/s category into 6 categories? Was there any framework or rational for this categorization.

15- What was the reference/s used for definitions of interest, position, power and influence on HCV-related programs and policies?

16- I think author/s followed two phases: Identifying the stakeholders (through interviews and documents) AND examining the view of participants toward stakeholder's roles (through expert opinions)
17- More explanations about the last phases of the study are needed? How many questionnaires were sent? how? how were they collected? how were the answers analyzed? what do you mean by the average response?

18- "Social network analysis" should be introduced in the introduction.

19- How the author/s guarantee the vigor of the present study? should explain more details about the vigorous.

Results:

1- 29 HCV-related stakeholders in Iran were identified. How about the actors? If there is no difference, why did the author/s ask two questions?

2- Page 7: "while 2 stakeholders (1.73%) in the private sector and international agencies": Replace 2 by 4.

3- MU (the main health care providers in Iran): What does it mean? How did you conclude they are main? I think it is better to introduce 29 stakeholders, add one paragraph for each stakeholder. The audiences are not Iranian and they need to be familiar with the context of Iran and different stakeholders as well.

4- Page 5 (28). "according to the comments of the participants", Or "According to participant's viewpoints" which comments or viewpoint? there is required to write the quotation if there is any viewpoint or comments.

5- Abbreviations in the results section should be briefed.

6- The results section is very short and not informative. It is not clear how to come to these findings.

Discussion and conclusion:

1- It is expected to discuss the findings of the study here in the discussion section. noting to some general statement like "Disagreements and different standpoints concerning the development and implementation of healthcare policies can be a challenge (34), even
though negotiations can mitigate such contrasts and contribute to find an optimal compromise (35)" is not appropriate. Instead, the author/s should explain their findings and give the key messages and implications of the study. What is the contribution of the present study to current knowledge?

2- "In the case of HCV-related policies in Iran, a lack of cooperation has hindered a proper implementation of the plans" what is the reference? it is a claim needs a reference.

3- "One of the noticeable findings of the present investigation is that, despite the fact that HCV was identified as a challenge for Iran's health sector, many stakeholders believed that they could not do much. Many stakeholders tended to consider the disease merely as a priority of the MOHME". Based on which finding, the author/s came to this conclusion?

4- Page 8, 59: "…low, and this is a challenge that can affect policy implementation" how can affect?

5- Generally, the discussion section includes findings and claims that are not clear for me how the author/s came to them? It is required to rewrite this section with regard to highlight the main findings (not repeating the findings) and then show how these findings can contribute to current knowledge, what are the implications both for policymakers and public?

6- Similarity, the conclusion is very general and does not encompass any clear message.

General:

1- For all abbreviation, it is needed to state the full format at the first use.

2- Editing by a native English man is required, some words such as a fight with the diseases are not popular.
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