Author’s response to reviews

Title: Obstacles and opportunities to using research evidence in local public health decision-making in England

Authors:

Dylan Kneale (d.kneale@ucl.ac.uk)

Antonio Rojas-García (a.rojas-garcia@ucl.ac.uk)

James Thomas (James.Thomas@ucl.ac.uk)

Version: 1 Date: 15 Feb 2019

Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Editors and Reviewers,

Thank you for your comments on our submission entitled “Obstacles and opportunities to using research evidence in local public health decision-making in England”. We found these really useful in helping to improve our manuscript and attach our response to these below.

Thank you and best wishes,

Dylan Kneale on behalf of the authors

Reviewer reports:

Reviewer #1: Thank you for offering me to review the manuscript titled 'Obstacles and opportunities to using research evidence in public health decisionmaking'. The paper describes the impact of the changes of the reorganization in public health. The paper makes an interesting contribution to the shifts that are currently happening in terms of overhauling public health responsibility and cuts in funding and its impact on the use of evidence in public health policymaking. Furthermore the results section is very pleasant to read.

In order to progress the paper towards publication, I suggest that the authors make several minor changes to the manuscript. I am outlining my suggestions in the following.
Overall:

- First of all, I like figures. However I'm not sure how beneficial figure 1 is, especially because I'm not sure how to read the figure and how all parts are connected to each other and how what it adds. For instance, what is the relation between the left and right text in the orange square. Furthermore, some details should be changed, to make its appearance better, such as arrows and squares. A minor detail: in the blue box a word seems missing because of the word 'and'.

Response: Thank you for this comment – we had intended for this figure to better communicate the findings but we have removed it as it does not appear to be fulfilling this remit.

- The focus is especially on the UK context, which is a choice. However the manuscript would benefit when addressing a part in the discussion about how other countries can learn from these re-organizations in terms on responsibility, budgetary constraints and the impact on the one who work in the organizations. Furthermore, other countries, for example NL, have had these re-organizations like this as well, and I miss information from that perspective. How did other countries deal with this and how could UK learn from these countries.

Response: Thank you for this comment – we agree that this is a useful reflection and have added in a paragraph in response.

- I'm wondering if the terminology evidence based is in place and what the reason of the authors is to use this term instead of evidence informed. Especially because their main conclusion is about context, which makes it necessary to interpret public health evidence before its actual use.

Response: Thank you for this – we have now updated some usage of this referring to evidence informed policy/practice although have kept the term evidence-based in the context of guidelines/guidance.

- I like the conclusion of more focus on the local context to make public health evidence applicable in local (public health) policymaking, however the authors lack to contribute in the manuscript how this should be done. I think there are several studies done in other countries to
integrate the local context in public health policymaking. Additionally, this would help also to make findings again more generic for other cases when the context is considered and described.

Response – Thank you for this comment – we agree and have added in more information on this.

Specifics:
- I'm not sure what is meant with the sentence on page 4, row 6-8: However, to avoid adopting a stance akin to an 'information deficit model' around the use of research evidence, which inherently assumes that there is an information gap that can be plugged by ever more peer-reviewed research or systematic reviews [16].

Thank you – we have clarified this language

- First sentence in the methods section (page 4) is missing a word or two: This paper is based on interviews were conducted with twelve PHPs situated within public health teams across three Local Authorities (LAs).

Thank you

- The method section in the abstract is very clear described. In the manuscript itself this part is very elaborately described, such as the steps and process of the approach in Nvivo. However for me it seems that the main aim why this approach is chosen is lacking.

Thank you – we have added in a sentence to help to justify our approach

- The limitation section highlights short data saturation and mentions the following sentence: The breadth of the sample does increase its generalisability in some ways. I'm curious what these some ways are and how this can be placed in the context.
We have clarified this sentence.

Reviewer #2: This is a welcome qualitative study report on the use of research evidence in public health decision making.

Though the manuscript does not necessarily bring innovative new knowledge, the way it both builds on previous research and approaches the local level policy making from the qualitative angle, adds a lot to our understanding of the lived experience of research-policy practice integration.

Further, the contextual description of the study is excellent, including the time dimension related to the recent transfer of public health responsibilities to the local level.

Other issues such as introduction, methods, analysis and discussion, are well built and relevant to the topic.

Thank you for these comments – we were very pleased to read them.

Reviewer #3: The paper is well written however some aspects of the methods and results need to be clarified.

The title mentions obstacles and opportunities, but mostly obstacles are presented in the article. It was hard to identify opportunities in the results and discussion section therefore I would like to recommend addition/restructuring to include more clear values of opportunities. Starting with re-phrasing the last phrase of page 5, line 23, where again, only challenges are mentioned, the article lacks this clear understanding of both obstacles and opportunities.

Thank you – this is a really useful observation and we have incorporated this into our conclusion.

The title should include "local" before public health decision-making as the article only focused on local actions.
Thank you – we have added this

After going through the whole article it was clear to me that the decision-makers are politicians. Therefore I would recommend in the abstract, line 57, in "to better meet political decision-making needs" or decision-makings needs of politicians. The conclusion of the abstract is hard to follow as it is a long phrase, I recommend restructuring or reducing the conclusion, here is an example that might be used: "To better meet political decision-making needs a shift in the scope of public health evidence is required. Particularly at a systematic review level, evidence should move from broad global generalisations to narrow simple forms of evidence with applicability at local level. This will lead to local policy decisions supported by public health evidence."

Thank you – we have amended this

Additional recommendations to shorten the phrases and make them specific:

page 3 line 15 - responsibilities instead of responsibility page 3 lines 32-37 - please split this into two different sentences.

Thank you – we have amended this

page 3 line 45 - referral to "newly-created Health and Wellbeing Boards" should be make in the first phrase of the Background. Readers outside the English public health system should be able to fully understand the background of hoe the public health work is re-organized from the beginning of the article.

Thank you – we have amended this

page 4, lines 16-19: for the aims of the study, please mention again the reorganization from which system to which system (i) similar for the (iii) changing patterns, from which patterns?

Thank you – we have amended this
page 4, line 40: you use the acronym PHPs, you might want to replace it here as well

Thank you – we have amended this

page 5, lines 19-20: including in the use "of" qualitative research

Thank you – we have amended this

page 15, lines 47-48 [...] evidence needs "in local patterns" that are unmet from [...]  

Thank you – we have amended this