Reviewer’s report

Title: Embedding implementation research to enhance health policy and systems: a multi-country analysis from ten settings in Latin America and the Caribbean

Version: 0 Date: 03 Jun 2019

Reviewer: Jill Olivier

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for this opportunity to review this paper on embedded implementation approaches in 10 countries through the iPIER program. The cluster of work on embedded research is critically important and currently very topical in health policy and systems research, and intervention. The authors are well known in this area, and well positioned to provide insight into the lessons from these interventions. The manuscript is well written and well edited.

I provide some comments in the spirit of supporting the strengthening of this publication.

> Across the intro, discussion, and conclusion, the authors do not appear to really engage with the current publication and thinking (especially in 2017 and 2018) on embedded HPSR. While this is not a review article, so fair enough, I believe this article would be greatly enriched by some fuller explanation of the thinking behind (their particular) framing of embedded implementation (and how it compares to the recent progress in work on embedded 'health systems research' vs embedded 'health system strengthening' intervention). Some of the key findings are well supported in the broader literature, and would be better substantiated by connection to this. At this time, the paper seems strangely disconnected from the broader thinking and work on embedded research and local research translation that has occurred in the last couple of years.

> Introduction: I would suggest that it would be extremely helpful if the authors clearly referenced their existing publications on this issue and project - some of which overlaps with this publication (such as the Alliance reports on this same project, the Rev Panam Salud Publica Overview etc). I believe it would enhance this argument (not detract from it), if the reader were aware of this collection of related publication on same and similar projects.

> Introduction: "Traditionally, scientists and researchers have led the health research agenda, with little engagement of stakeholders and a consideration of end-users as passive audiences for research findings (3, 4)" … this comment, rapidly made, feels a little too summarised for a very complex issue that is not quite so black and white as presented here. For example, this ignores the challenges of Northern- or global institutionally-driven research agendas - and how powerless Southern LMIC health systems and researchers sometimes are to shape research
agendas. This comment feels too pat and generalizing for the more complex realities relating to embedded research (which are well covered in the current literature)

> The methods section is missing a great deal of detail that could be easily and concisely provided (note, some of this is provided much later in the results section, but that is much too late). For example, how and when was data collected? and what scope (how much); how many documents were reviewed - using what parameters?; how many surveys were sent out vs how many responses were analyzed? was this a brief survey or a full survey?; how many decision makers were interviewed? Full length interviews or brief chats? The authors talk about a small sample size - but haven't actually said what size the sample is. Also, WHEN were these things done? It seems like perhaps data collection happened in 2015 and 2016? Or has some been done more recently? Please clarify and justify (I would find it particularly interesting if more recent data collection or verification had happened, which would give some understanding of whether the embedded approach had longevity/sustainability).

> It would be extremely helpful to understand early on (before the results) what this 'innovative model' is, what it's characteristic are, and what exactly makes it innovative (again, linking to the broader literature). It is mentioned that 'we' developed the innovative model, and for that reason, it would be useful to have some further background on who developed what, when, based on what. This is never fully unpacked - and the note on page 7 that "characteristics of the embedded implementation research projects are provided in Table 1" is not adequate for this key issue. (Also, it is not clear where Table 1 would be placed in the text? - and Table 1 does not clearly explain to the reader what this innovative model is).

> The presentation of results (by data collection type) feels cumbersome. The issues being (briefly) presented appear to be based on the same questions (although this is not clarified), so a synthesized results section presenting findings on particular issues would make a lot more sense to me.

> The findings are interesting and relevant - although it would be useful if it was clearer who which recommendation is targeted at - for embedded research or embedded implementation? for global or local actors? for researchers or policy makers? ... and the fuzziness on whether this is about embedded research or embedded intervention (mentioned earlier) remains.

> Pg 16 - I would not use the term 'paradigm shift' - you have not this far argued for a paradigm shift, and I do not feel calling for closer engagement between researchers and policymakers/users can be considered a shift of paradigmatic proportions.
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