Reviewer's report

Title: Exchanging and using research evidence in health policy networks: a statistical network analysis

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Reviewer: Patrick Jeurissen

Reviewer's report:

The main contribution of this article it that is emphasizes the importance of networks for the dissemination and uptake of research to policy makers (p. 17 and ref 12). Due to the fact that the results are issue and connectivity dependent, it is hard to come to replicable policy advice.

The investigation of the formation and the use of network relationships is robust, but no external mediating (out-of-network) factors, such as the actual content at stake or the 'neccessity' to produce policy, that may induce or limit the uptake of the research are discussed. This is a pity, because it might have added to the conclusions of the study and because the specific context seems to matter quite a bit - as the case of child health seems to illustrate; and the strengths and limitation and conclusive sections states. I also have not come across the description of the actual policy cases and research studied (p. 9). Thus the conclusion, that the findings support a network lense (i.e. individual connectedness) seems only to be confirmed within the fluid limits of the specific network boundaries at stake (p. 17).

Possible limitations of the assumed generalization to other countries and policy arena's could have been discussed in more detail as well. The strengths and limitations section is (far) to meagre from my perspective.

The policy implications may not be that easy in practice. For example mapping the network is (much) more difficult than mapping the formal organizational structure (p. 19).

Minor comments
1. Not only in developing countries may policy decisions be made by a range of actors (ref 27-29). (p. 6)

2. I am not convinced why the use of research is weak due to these 'barriers'. Maybe, it can be the case that as a result of lack of competition, the effect of the sparsely available research is in fact quite large (p. 6). It is for example interesting what the researchers do held from the fact that there seem to be very few full-time researchers among the interview sample (p. 10 and table 1).

3. Please elaborate why closed networks are dominated by international actors (p. 7).

4. Why is high density of research provision consistent with complex knowledge
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

none of these