



Developing and Innovating: Methods for Health Policy and Systems Research

Anne Mills

“Mexico to Mali: Taking Stock of Achievements in Health Policy and Systems Research”. Nyon, Switzerland, 25-27 May 2008.



Health Services Research: Google search

- Journals *Health Services Research* and *Health Services Research and Policy*
- Health Services Research Units at LSHTM and the University of Aberdeen
- *Health Services Research Methods: A Guide to Best Practice*, eds Black, Brazier, Fitzpatrick, Reeves, Blackwell BMJ Books
- Masters degree courses in health services research



Content of Paper

- Examines the health services research methods literature
- Reviews the content of the Taskforce for Health Systems Research report and ‘Sound Choices’ for methodological content
- Characterises the field of HPSR methods
- Suggests priorities
- Identifies challenges



Aim of Health Services Research

- 'to produce reliable and valid research data on which to base appropriate, effective, cost-effective, efficient and acceptable health services' (Bowling 1997)



List of chapters in Black et al (1998) Health Services Research Methods

- Part one: Measurement of benefits and costs
- Part two: Methods of evaluating health care
- Part three: Statistical methods
- Part four: Presenting, interpreting, and synthesising evidence
- Part five: Future developments



Studying the Organisation and Delivery of Health Services

- Fulop et al (2001) 'Research on the way health services are delivered and organised is part of the broader field of health services (or health systems) research which has become well-established in the UK, North America and parts of Europe in the last twenty years.'
- Kerr-White:
 - health systems research: 'a set of resources that a society mobilises and institutions that it organises to respond to the health conditions and needs of its population' and
 - health services research: one element of the response



Fulop et al (2001)

- Micro: that of the individual practitioner or patient
- Meso: that of institutions
- Macro: that of the health system



How is HPSR different?

- Addition of the word ‘policy’ (research not just for policy but also on policy)
- Encompasses more prominently the global level
- Includes broader determinants of health



Report of the Taskforce for Health Systems Research

- Very limited material on methods
- Very imprecise wording (eg 'lack of methodological rigour')



Sound Choices: Methodological Priorities for Capacity Development

- Methods for comparing across different contexts and health systems
- Methods for studying corruption
- Basic concepts such as equity
- Ethical dimensions of HPSR
- Systematic review methods
- How different disciplines relate to each other



The Methodology of HPSR

- Disciplines
- Purpose of research
- Approaches to research
- Types of research
- Methods of research
- Data sources
- Analytical methods



Suggested Priorities for Action

- Textbook and/or reader/anthology in HPSR methods
- Methods for comparative studies
- How specific methods are selected and combined to answer specific health policy questions



Challenges

- Traditional research funders fear that HPSR does not produce generalisable findings
- Generally poor quality of much HPSR highlights need to invest in capacity development
- Structures and mechanisms are needed to link the policy making and research communities to agree research priorities and identify research questions