

Policy Worlds: Anthropology And The Analysis Of Contemporary Power

Contandriopoulos et al. *Implementation Science* (2017) 12:116
DOI 10.1186/s13012-017-0464-4

Implementation Science

STUDY PROTOCOL

Open Access

Structural analysis of health-relevant policy-making information exchange networks in Canada



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Abstract

Background: Health systems worldwide struggle to identify, adopt, and implement in a timely and system-wide manner the best—evidence-informed—policy-level practices. Yet, there is still only limited evidence about individual and institutional best practices for fostering the use of scientific evidence in policy-making processes. The present project is the first national-level attempt to (1) map and structurally analyze—quantitatively—health-relevant policy-making networks that connect evidence production, synthesis, interpretation, and use; (2) qualitatively investigate the interaction patterns of a subsample of actors with high centrality metrics within these networks to develop an in-depth understanding of evidence circulation processes; and (3) combine these findings in order to assess a policy network's "absorptive capacity" regarding scientific evidence and integrate them into a conceptually sound and empirically grounded framework.

Methods: The project is divided into two research components. The first component is based on quantitative analysis of ties (relationships) that link nodes (participants) in a network. Network data will be collected through a multi-step snowball sampling strategy. Data will be analyzed structurally using social network mapping and analysis methods. The second component is based on qualitative interviews with a subsample of the Web survey participants having central, bridging, or atypical positions in the network. Interviews will focus on the process through which evidence circulates and enters practice. Results from both components will then be integrated through an assessment of the network's and subnetwork's effectiveness in identifying, capturing, interpreting, sharing, reframing, and recodifying scientific evidence in policy-making processes.

Discussion: Knowledge developed from this project has the potential both to strengthen the scientific understanding of how policy-level knowledge transfer and exchange functions and to provide significantly improved advice on how to ensure evidence plays a more prominent role in public policies.

Keywords: Health-relevant policies, Health policy, Knowledge exchange, Policy-making, Social network analysis

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