



## Research Utilization in Public Health

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### Editorial

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### Editorial

Public health evolved with time and research has played a pivotal role in its development. Public health research can provide important information about disease trends and risk factors, treatment outcomes or public health interventions, functional abilities, patterns of care, and health care costs and use [1]. Public health research is important to understand, assess and prioritize the health problems to address through policy interventions, preventive measures, and quality assurance by regular monitoring and evaluation [2]. Interventions based on public health research have a beneficial impact on health status [3]. But more research does not guarantee more research utilization because all public health research is not used [4]. Most of the research is completed on paper without bringing it into practice [5]. There is no shortage of research published in different forms but utilization is inadequate. There is a gap in research and bringing it into practice. It takes an average of 17 years for 14% of published evidence to be widely incorporated into clinical practice [6]. Efforts to close this gap between evidence and practice are referred to as "knowledge translation" [7] which also includes research utilization as one of its domains [8]. Diffusion, dissemination, implementation, knowledge transfer, knowledge mobilisation, linkage and exchange, and research into practice are the terms being used to describe research utilization [9]. Translation of research into practice is a good thing [10] but there is growing recognition that the full potential for research evidence to improve practice in healthcare settings, either in relation to clinical practice or to managerial and decision making, is not yet realized [11].

Public health research is becoming increasingly important in India. Despite this, there are challenges identified with the using research done in India, such as

integrating it with international research [12], support to apply knowledge, skills to interpret and use, self-efficacy, access to information, time to implement new ideas, facilities for implementing the ideas, interest [13,14], demand of evidence for planning and policy purpose, visionary planning and reward system are lacking. Underutilization of research is also due to limited resources to areas of greatest need and impact, a lack of geographically-specific information [15], poor technical content of findings, diversion of resources to other national priorities, and difference in research priorities [16]. Obtaining different results while doing the same interventions with different sets of population [17], disagreement between researchers and decision makers, the culture of decision making, competing influences on decision making and practical constraints [18] adversely affect the research utilization.

Research findings validated through a recognized body or published in high-impact peer-reviewed journals are considered more effective by decision-makers and practitioners [19,20]. Therefore, the robustness of different research and quality output is also critical in its implementation [21], not able to influence their utilization. However, publishing research in high-impact peer-reviewed journals is also a costly affair for students and small-scale organizations which lack funds due to which their research can remain unknown and unused. Though there are multiple options for disseminating the research findings like publishing with online journals, social websites, online libraries, webinars, seminars, workshops, etc., each platform has a different reach, credibility, and audience. Therefore, choosing the right platform for disseminating the research findings is also a factor in the acceptability of research and its further utilization.

## Opportunities for Research Utilization

There are good opportunities available with government as well as non-governmental organizations to make use of the research evidence in providing solutions for health problems of people through micro-level planning. Generally, planning is not very exhaustive and allows less time to go in deep and become more participatory. But the decentralized planning process provides an opportunity to engage more stakeholders and local level prioritization of resources [22]. The healthcare needs of people living in different geographical, social, cultural, and political environments can vary, so accordingly area and community-specific solutions are required. The local research-based findings, if available with health authorities at the block and district level, can suggest health solutions that are more applicable to the people of that area. In this regard, the NGOs can play a vital role in fostering research utilization, knowledge management, and resource mobilization by prioritizing the issues, and presenting feasible research-based solutions to the health authorities at the block, district, and state levels. The research done by development agencies in their geographies can be shared with decision-makers and health system experts to build in planning [23,24]. NGOs by collaborating with academia can promote quality in evidence generation and dissemination thereby reducing inequality in research outcomes and its utilization.

In India, the opportunities for research utilization have improved in recent years because of the implementation of new policies in digital health, telemedicine, etc. new guidelines on public health standards, and the launching of many new health programs and schemes. An inclusive approach towards health policies and programs, promoting innovations, emphasis on quality, resource optimization, deeper engagement with stakeholders, the idea of equity, dignity, patient's rights, etc. are creating demand for more research-based evidence. So, if there is any available research, analysis from data, or any learning of implementation programs, that can also be shared to strengthen the new healthcare initiatives. A health program launched in one state can be tailored to the healthcare needs of another state by using research evidence. Even within a state, the healthcare needs of rural and urban areas need different health solutions [23,24].

This is the era of digital health and artificial intelligence. The digital health platform is gradually expanding and presenting a scope for more research that can help to understand the patterns of health services delivery and access at the level of service provider and patient. The growing use of Artificial intelligence and machine learning are providing new solutions to achieve sustainable development goals. There is a great need for public health research to

understand the health-seeking behavior of people of different backgrounds. The automation of healthcare services at the community and facility level provides enormous data for various analyses in the context of the diversified healthcare needs of the country through machine learning. The practical approach of the government in promoting documentation of success stories and best practices to disseminate the impact of various health initiatives through digital platforms is also creating demand for research findings for showcasing, advocacy, awareness, and motivating others. Research-based evidence is required for designing the awareness generation material. Quality improvement in public health facilities and service delivery also requires research-based evidence.

## Need to Promote Research Utilization in Public Health

Public health research comprises biomedical research, social health research, epidemiological research, health service delivery, health economics, clinical health, community health, health seeking behaviour, health technology and health infrastructure. The research evidence generated in all these areas of public health are important for development and timely revision of policies, guidelines and treatment protocols etc., to keep them rationalistic and logical with the changing healthcare needs of society. Increasing the research utilization is more useful nowadays because the landscape of dissemination has been so wide that every sort of information can be easily disseminated via social media without any cost which very soon influences the health seeking behavior of people. Dissemination of right knowledge to the people is decisive so that people will be able to discern what is right healthy behavior and the prevailing myths and beliefs in the society can be countered. However, documenting the findings in a way that they are easy to understand and one can practice them, is also a challenge. Health care professionals usually receive little or no formal training in writing. Therefore, converting available public health research into a usable knowledge product, targeting the different audience, gives value to the research findings and promotes research utilization as well. Research utilization should also be increased to maintain the value of work. If a research does not find place into practice, then there is risk of losing value with the availability of new findings from some new research. Therefore, dissemination of research is very important to narrow the gap between research and practice and to replicate the research learning in other areas as well.

Promoting health research utilization is essential to improve health and health equity to deliver diverse population health needs critical to attaining sustainable health outcomes. A study based on the analysis of original research papers shows that in India only 3.3% were based on public health. Research topics that are high on priority lists

need to be identified and conducted more scientifically if they are to be meaningful, acceptable, and applicable. Systematic priority setting, adequate funding, and institutional capacity building are needed to address health inequities. Research utilization can bring the equitable distribution of resources and equitable utilization of resources. Promoting research utilization can make public healthcare planning more inclusive and relevant to the current healthcare needs. It can promote more brainstorming among the stakeholders and strengthen their capacity. More sharing of information among stakeholders in different sectors can promote convergence and save duplication of efforts to generate new knowledge.

## Conclusion

Research in public health should focus on needs and quality in order to make a long-term contribution. It is necessary to research a problem in detail so that practitioners and policy makers can be encouraged to use the results. When designing the study, one should also delve deeply into whether the research will add any value to existing knowledge. This advanced approach will allow to choose the right resources and methods to make the research more impactful and useful for the public health field. The findings should be widely disseminated through credible platforms for high visibility, validation, and recognition. To address the challenge of funding shortages and to bring global value to the research, collaborations with world-class academic institutions should be explored. Public health initiatives must also foster the culture of utilizing research in their design and implementation.

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