Assessing the quality of evidence on social determinants of health

A summary of

How to cite this NCCMT summary:

Categories: Method, Appraise, Synthesize
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Relevance For Public Health
The authors provide an example of how linked knowledge leads to a favourable recommendation regarding early childhood developmental interventions in improving overall health and narrowing health disparities.

Description
This paper discusses methods policymakers can use to appraise research evidence related to the social determinants of health. The paper describes the historical approach to critical appraisal and argues for evolving a more comprehensive approach for the broad range of interventions related to the social determinants of health.

The authors make a case that criteria should include more than simply issues of study design. Several resources are listed to guide the assessment of evidence, and a case is provided.

The framework for studying social interventions and the social determinants of health includes:

- **Using the best available knowledge from a range of sources and methods:** considerations include the appropriateness of study design, quality of implementation, internal and external validity judgements, and relevance to translation into practice. Resources for critical appraisal are suggested.
- **Building a relevant knowledge base:** there may be a lack of evidence and/or it may be difficult to design a study around a particular social factor and health outcome. However, using “linked knowledge” allows researchers and policymakers to reveal connections and make inferences (e.g., logic models, causal pathways and indirect effects). Consideration of association vs. causality, study design, and more at each stage or step of the chain of health effects should be carefully and critically analyzed.
- **Acting responsibly in the face of uncertainty:** the goal is to identify and apply the best available knowledge when making policy decisions, while fully acknowledging its limitations.

Implementing the Tool
Who is Involved?
Public health and medical researchers, practitioners and policy decision-maker audiences.

Steps for Using Tool
The paper describes three main comprehensive standards for the use of evidence in social policy decision-making to improve knowing when recommendations for action can be made.

The user is guided through the three criteria. Additional resources, internal validity criteria and a case study are provided as further information.
Evaluation and Measurement Characteristics

Evaluation
Information not available

Validity
Not applicable

Reliability
Not applicable

Methodological Rating
Not applicable

Tool Development

Developers
Paula Braveman

Method of Development

The authors built on the principles in "Evidence-Based Medicine" (EBM). In doing so, they provide historical background information and a review of EBM. They make the case for the need for more comprehensive evidence-based standards and practices when studying the social determinants of health.

Release Date
2011

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These summaries are written by the NCCMT to condense and to provide an overview of the resources listed in the Registry of Methods and Tools and to give suggestions for their use in a public health context. For more information on individual methods and tools included in the review, please consult the authors/developers of the original resources.
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