Research on Health Policy Implementation Poses Several Challenges

- Implementation of health policies can change over time. Generally, it takes about a decade for the effects of policy to appear at the health system and outcome levels. However, this process is often shortened through the use of appropriate research methodologies.
- Several components of policy implementation interact and are interdependent, so it can be challenging to measure unidirectional causality.
- Health outcomes are influenced by factors external to the policy intervention. Hence, it’s difficult to directly attribute changes in health outcomes to policy interventions.
- Outcomes of the research may be related to the appropriateness of the policy rather than its implementation, thus detracting from the purpose of the study.

Studying Health Policy Implementation is a Complex Process

The USAID-funded Health Policy Project (HPP) has developed a conceptual framework to show the links among health policy, health systems, and health outcomes, based on an extensive literature review and decades of experience conducting health policy work in various countries.

- Dimensions of policy implementation help define how policies can be better implemented. For example:
  - Institutional relationships and power dynamics among organizations
  - Capacity of organizations to implement policy
  - Financing and allocation of resources to fund policies
  - Strategic planning and analysis of policy barriers
  - Monitoring and accountability mechanisms

- Based on this extensive literature review, several methodologies have been used to study and define policy implementation.

Approaches to Data Collection That Can Be Used to Study Policy Implementation

- Document analyses
- Secondary data analyses
- Observation
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Power cube: addresses the forms of power noted in places of engagement, such as workshops and focus groups

Discussion

- It is difficult to establish causality because policy implementation is a complex process.
- The best methodology should be used for each research question.
- Policy implementation research can help explain the link between policy development and program implementation.
- Clear research recommendations should indicate the programmatic, research, and policy relevance of the findings.
- Main research findings should be communicated to relevant stakeholders in an appropriate manner.

References


RESEARCH METHODS USED TO STUDY POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

**DESCRITVE**

**ANALYTIC**

**Experimental**

**Quasi-experimental**

Assigns research subjects to the intervention group in a non-random fashion.

Assigns research subjects to the intervention and control groups in a random fashion; this design is also referred to as the “gold standard.”

Assigns research subjects to the intervention group and non-intervention group.

Pre-intervention Post-intervention

**B1** Pre-intervention **A2** Post-intervention

**B2** Post-intervention

**B1** Pre-intervention **A2** Post-intervention

Pre-intervention Post-intervention