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Impacts of Health Impact Assessments:
A Multiple Case Study of the U.S. Experience

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Protecting Health, Saving Lives—*Millions at a Time*

Background

- Monitoring and evaluation important steps
- Individual case studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that HIA effective supports the decision-making process
- Some cases impact of a HIA is clear-cut
- Other cases it is challenging to attribute a particular decision to the influence of a HIA
- Limited empirical data on impacts. People often ask, “what difference did it make?”



Methods

- Research question: What types of impacts have HIAs had in the U.S.?
- Specific Aims:
 - 1. Assess key process evaluation measures, including how HIAs are defined and conducted, scope and resources needed, and approach to stakeholder engagement.
 - 2. Determine if and how HIAs impacted the decision-making process.
 - 3. Identify key facilitators and barriers of HIAs having an impact on decision-making.
 - 4. Explore other impacts of HIAs beyond the specific pending decision, including cross-sector collaboration, level of knowledge, etc.



Methods

- Study design: multiple case study; HIA unit of analysis;
- Retrospective data collection
- Formative stage: unstructured key Informants interviews with experts in the field to develop interview guide (n=3)
- Develop and pilot tested interview guide
- Identification of HIAs
 - 1999 - completed by July 2010
 - List from the CDC, field, snowball sampling
 - Cleaned, removed duplicates
 - Inclusive, self-reported HIA



Methods

- Conducted semi-structured interviews with the lead HIA team member
- Audio files transcribed, validated, and uploaded into NVIVO 9
- Codebook developed, iterative process,
 - Trained coders, coded same transcripts to ensure inter-rater reliability
 - Divided up among three coders
- Systematic document review (also in NVIVO 9)
- JHSPH Institutional Review Board



Sample

- 73 HIAs identified as completed through July 2010
- Interviews with 25 HIA team members associated with 60 HIAs conducted in 15 different States (82% of eligible sample)
- Issues explored:
 - Information about the process: how, who, scope, goals
 - Definitions of success
 - HIA recommendations (why adopted and why not adopted)
 - Impacts (factors, both direct and indirect)
 - Failures and challenges
 - Importance of timing
 - Stakeholders (community involvement, role of decision-makers)
 - Cost (time, staff, money)
 - Training
 - Advocacy



Sample Characteristics

- N= 60 HIAs
- HIA Level: rapid/desktop/brief, intermediate/moderate, comprehensive/full
- Conducting agency: academic, government agency, non-profit, health department (county or local)
- HIA topic: land use/development/planning; policy; transportation; housing; natural resources; other
- Goal: explicit and implicit



Definitions of Success

- Most discussed how health is now part of the discussion when decisions being made
 - “There has been a culture change...planning department is now routinely considering health”
 - “...new partnerships between health and other agencies”
- Education of Policymakers
 - “...[through HIA process]...educated decision-maker about how a policy that seemed to have nothing to do with health, actually has health consequences”
 - “...decision-makers now routinely thinking about health...”



Definitions of Success

- **Community engagement**
 - HIA provided an avenue for the community to be involved in a decision
 - Addressed community concerns, particularly regarding inequities
 - Increasing community awareness about HIA and about how to use the results in their advocacy efforts
- **Impacts**
 - All recommendations adopted into the proposed project or plan
 - Influenced the final design of the project
 - Viewed as a translational tool



HIA Recommendations

Facilitators to Adoption

- Strong stakeholder and community engagement
- Engagement with decision maker – having a trustworthy relationship
- Recommendations were clearly written, in necessary format, and supported by scientific evidence
- Timeliness of the HIA

Barriers to Adoption

- Skepticism: health connections aren't obvious, and to non-health agencies, seem unlikely, distal
- Regulatory limits: agency lacks authority to implement recommendations; recommendations not written in statutory/regulatory language
- Timing: HIA delivered after decision was made
- Did not engage decision-making body upfront



Framework for HIA Effectiveness (Wismar et al, 2007)

Health issues adequately acknowledged?	Modification of pending decision based on HIA	
	YES	NO
YES	<u>Direct effectiveness:</u> HIA-related changes in the decision; due to HIA proposed project dropped or postponed	<u>Indirect (General) effectiveness:</u> HIA acknowledged but changes not made to the proposal; HIA raised awareness among policymakers
NO	<u>Opportunistic effectiveness</u> The decision (i.e., health promoting decision) would have been made anyway	<u>No effectiveness:</u> HIA ignored or dismissed



HIA Impacts

Direct

- Change in plan or project
- Recommendations adopted into plan or part of enacted legislation
- New formal interagency collaborations

Indirect

- New informal interagency collaborations and/or objectives; especially in areas where several HIAs conducted
- New coalitions formed around an area
- Changed culture regarding health



Lessons Learned

(Many of the HIAs were 1st for the practitioner)

- Importance of stakeholder engagement and doing it well
- Partnerships critical to get the right data, work with other sectors who have jurisdiction over decision
- Beware of underestimating resources
- Challenges of policy HIAs



Study Limitations

- Self-reported HIAs
- Recall bias
- Interviews with HIA team members and document review
- Cross-sectional, single time point – challenge with rapidly growing field



Conclusions

- HIA is an effective decision-support tool
- HIAs have many positive impacts and benefits
- Evidence that HIAs can increase the likelihood that health is “at the table”
- HIAs most effective at increasing awareness of health and/or social determinants of health when HIA process is inclusive, timely, balanced in the assessment, and transparent



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