

Study Guide: Profiling HIAs - Successes and Failures

Issues and Questions

HIA can be a powerful tool for affecting public health through policy change and community development practices. While some HIAs have been successful at accomplishing this task, others have fallen short. In Thursday's class we will look at examples that highlight the pitfalls and triumphs of HIA.

HIA is a fairly new tool, and little attention has been paid to the formal evaluation of health impact assessments. There are many questions regarding the effectiveness of assessment - Does HIA impact the decision making process? Does it improve health and reduce inequalities? Even more fundamental, how should the success of HIA be evaluated?

Quigley and **Taylor** suggest that HIA evaluation should focus on the impact it has on the decision-making process, instead of evaluating long-term health outcomes or whether predicted impacts occurred. This is not to say that long-term monitoring is not important. However, in the short term, HIA practice is better served by focusing on process instead of impact evaluation. Impact evaluation is also needed but is more time and resource intensive, so it is not as easily accomplished. **Haigh and colleagues'** article is the first empirical study on the impact of HIA on decision-making and implementation of proposals in Australia and New Zealand. Haigh and colleagues suggest that the process of conducting an HIA can lead to notable successes, even before considering whether or not the assessment led to policy impacts. In contrast, **Krieger et al.** draw attention to the pitfalls of HIA. Authors state that "greater clarity is required regarding criteria for initiating, conducting, and completing HIA, including rules pertaining to decision making, enforcement, compliance, plus paying for their conduct."

Questions

1. According to Quigley and Taylor, why is evaluation of HIAs difficult? What are three ways health promotion initiatives can be evaluated?
2. What are some of the potential positive impacts of HIA? What are some of the potential shortfalls? Do you think HIA should be required in all public policies? Why or why not?
3. What are the three domains that Haigh and colleagues suggest should be used for evaluating the success of HIAs? What are some of the ways that the authors suggest HIAs are most effective?

Key Terms

Process Evaluation
Impact Evaluation
Outcome Evaluation

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