

Exploring health researchers' perceptions of policymaking in Argentina: A qualitative study

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Goal of Study

❖ In light of the dearth of evidence of health researchers' perceptions of evidence-based policymaking, the overall goal of this project is to understand the perspectives and attitudes of Argentine health researchers regarding the use and impact of health research in policy-making in Argentina.

Study Objectives

- ❖ Specific study objectives included:
 - describing the relationship of health researchers to politicians and policy-makers;
 - understanding the perceptions of policy-makers by health researchers;
 - exploring the context under which health research might be successfully translated into health policy.

Methods

❖ Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face with 20 key informant participants, representing sites in the Federal City of Buenos Aires and the provinces of Salta, Jujuy, Tucuman, Santiago del Estero and Catamarca, in Argentina's northwest region.

❖ Key informants were invited to share their experiences and perspectives regarding the research-to-policy process in Argentina and evidence-based policymaking within the Argentine public health sector regardless of content area or local, provincial or national scale.

❖ All 20 respondents self-identified as researchers and came from a wide variety of biological and social science backgrounds academically.

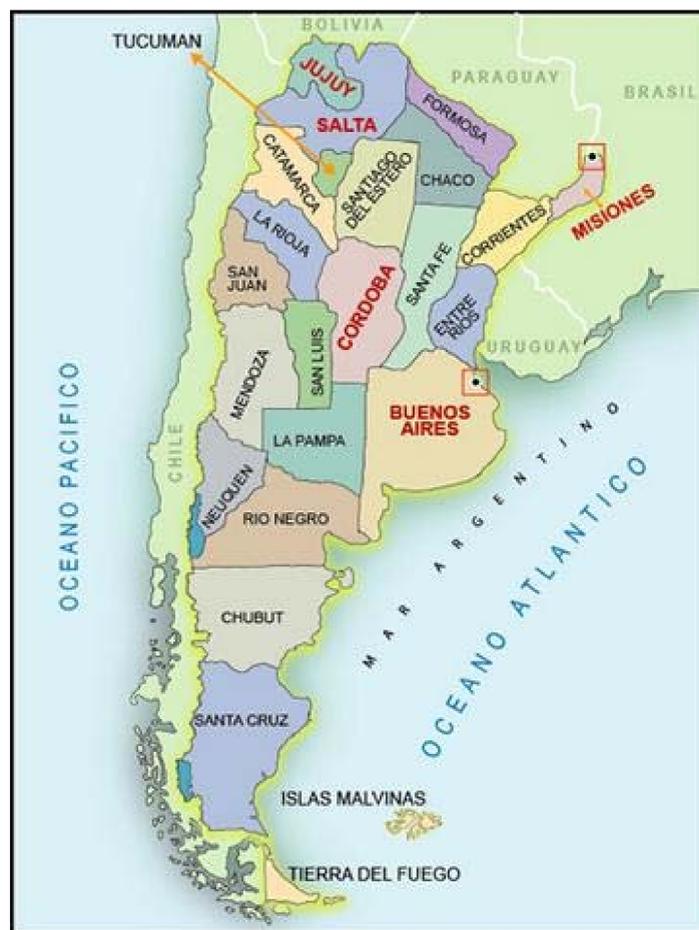
❖ At the time of the interview informants were working as researchers in universities, in a combined research and decision-making capacity for Ministries of Health, or within civil society organizations, such as think tanks. Two individuals interviewed were researchers who were former Ministers of Health for their respective provinces.

❖ Ethical approval was granted by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Institutional Review Board in Baltimore, Maryland, USA as well as from the Ethics Committee of the Hospital Francisco Muñiz in Buenos Aires, Argentina (el Comité de Ética del Hospital Francisco Muñiz de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires en Argentina), and free and informed consent was obtained from all informants.

Acknowledgements

❖ The authors would like to thank the Future Health Systems research consortium for financial support of this project and all the Argentine researchers who participated in the interviews.

Map of Argentina



"There is one very important barrier {to using research results to inform policymaking}, and that is that in Argentina the political system is a weak democracy. We still have a very weak democracy in Argentina. I think this is one of the strongest explanations you can find to not have evidence-based policies in Argentina."

Results

"...this country doesn't have a tradition [of physicians doing social science research] let alone public health research. Perhaps there is this tradition in clinical research, but not in public health research."

"I don't have a lot of trust in policymakers. I haven't seen results."

"You are in public health and public health is political."

"The biggest errors in administration and management are made by physicians who don't have the training to manage health policies."

"We technical experts have to develop solutions to all the problems so that the politician has a good image."

"...the difficulties of dialogue between decision-makers and academics are culturally rooted, on both sides."

"Behind a bureaucrat, there is always a technical expert who justifies that which the bureaucrat is doing. The problem is the [level and quality] of training behind this bureaucrat."

"All that we [in the provinces] do to improve the health of the population is ignored by the central level. We are ignored by the central power, by the central level of public health when they make decisions in public health. This is the policy of the nation, in the last four or five years."

"Yes, there's an advocacy role [for the researcher] as you'll have to convince the PM and sell him on it enough so that this relationship can be institutionalized, that it is not only an informal relationship, one where the politician does not only pick and choose. "

"Another of the big problems of a country like Argentina...is that every new administration disregards historical experiences."

Conclusion

❖ Argentina's tumultuous political history directly affected the academic and research communities, with military dictatorships in the 1970s catalyzing the deterioration of the public university system which still has not recovered from the fracture of the research community. There is a divide between public health research and biomedical research and also deep mistrust towards policymakers.

❖ Research was more likely to impact on policy in indirect ways, including shaping policy debate and mediating dialogue between service providers and users. Researchers that have been successful at transmitting their research findings to policymakers and helping create evidence-based policies invest much effort in involving researchers from the beginning of the study and sustain dialogue throughout the process.

❖ The extent of optimism for the future of evidence-informed policymaking was mixed. It was recognized that there are more resources being given to do research and train young researchers in Argentina, but it is not clear yet how this will contribute to strengthening the health research system in Argentina at the institutional level.