

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) as a tool to mobilise 'Health in All Policies'

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Impact

The aim of this work is to identify how HIA can be used as a tool to mobilise HiAP and also to fill some of the gaps in the HIA peer reviewed and grey literature. This is all viewed using Wales as a best practice example/early adopter, and it uses a mixed methodological approach. It has a number of innovative papers and has demonstrated originality in the field. The research contained in this thesis is aimed at a wide range of sectors practitioners and policy makers and can be used as a platform by researchers, PHIs or other IA and health and environmental organisations, practitioners, politicians and policy makers internationally. It can be used to advocate for the effective use of HIA, its benefits and help to make a case for investment in HIA and/or the allocation of resources for it.

Policy

The research has influenced policy and decision making within Wales and raised the profile of HIA as a practical and beneficial process through which to make explicit the health and equity impacts of proposed policies and plans (Welsh Government, 2021c, 2021b). It has explicitly supported the implicit HiAP aim of the Wellbeing of the Future Generations legislation in Wales by supporting policy making and cross sector thinking across the related SDG based Wellbeing Goals. It led to a number of requests to discuss the work at a national policy level and the climate change HIA included in Chapter 7 has led to action with a number of other sectors to consider health and identify co-benefits for example, waste (Andrew et al., 2022).

It also highlights how the HIAs carried out in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 had an impact and influence on cross sector policy and decision making and can be used to leverage the benefits of HiAP through HIA and supported the implementation of the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 which is to be implemented in 2023. Welsh Government used the findings of the research in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 to make changes to policy responses in respect to Brexit and COVID-19 (Senedd Home, 2019; Welsh Government, 2021c) and PHW have used the process to inform its internal planning policies and direction (Public Health Wales, 2022b). It has also been submitted to many governmental and other calls for evidence (The Health Foundation, 2019; UK Parliament, 2020; Welsh Parliament, 2020). Chapter 8 can also provide more confidence and assurance to policy and decision makers in the nature of predictive accuracy for prospective and concurrent HIAs and support efforts to advocate or legislate for the process.

Scientific impacts

The research consists of several unique papers which are examples of innovative HIAs and tests some theories which can contribute to the methodological evolution of HIA. The examples of methodological advancement for HIA are featured across the Chapters. Chapter 7 demonstrates for the first time how to map multiple complex interventions and policies such as Brexit, COVID-19 and climate change together (the Triple Challenge) and identify the synergies in health, wellbeing and equity impacts. Chapter 8 advances the field by researching for the first time the accuracy of prediction in prospective HIA – rather than retrospective when impacts have been observed and captured as part of evaluation processes. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide case study examples of HIAs and captures the process of carrying them out and the learning from them – something which was asked for by the stakeholders in Chapter 3.

The published papers have also been cited by other academics in English and other language publications – particularly since the pandemic has highlighted the importance of public health to society as a whole across a huge range of sectors including climate change and sustainable development, public health, spatial planning. It highlights HiAP and HIA as a way forward to recover and plan for renewal. (Diallo, 2022; Green et al., 2021c; Kalel et al., 2023; Urtaran-Laresgoiti et al., 2022). This research has been supported by a number of published commentaries (Chang et al., 2021; Green et al., 2021b).

It has also led to a collaboration of a number of international academics and practitioners with an interest in HIA establishing a research agenda for the field for the next 10 years (HIANet., 2022). Furthermore, a platform is provided for further research or areas of HIA activity for practitioners, researchers and academics to explore, for example prediction in, and effectiveness of, HIA and a further exploration of how other actors in the public health system such as Schools of Public Health view or promote HIA.

A recently published bibliographic analysis (Kim and Haigh, 2021) named this author as the lead of one of 5 clusters identified of co-authors and their academic interests (the 'Green et al' cluster). This cluster focuses on publishing work on HIA in relation to the process, its evaluation, effectiveness and provides case study examples. This thesis aims to continue to build on this work but also make connections to authors who work in other named clusters. This includes working on health equity, climate change (Haigh et al., forthcoming) and publishing a journal paper on Health in All Policies in a special edition edited by one of the other cluster leads (Green et al., 2021c).

Practice

The research presented in this thesis involved collaboration with a range of stakeholders including both practitioners and academics across several nations and is influencing work currently taking place or which has taken place globally, for example work in Portugal to scope the landscape around HIA the carrying out and analysis of a similar digital survey (Costa, 2022b). The research has also provided clear practice examples of when, and how, HIAs have been successfully carried out to support HIAP approaches including the challenges and opportunities and gaining knowledge, confidence and proxy experience from others who have walked the path before them. They can then be replicated in local or national contexts for example the carrying out of COVID-19 lockdown HIAs in Icelandic and Austrian (Antony et al., 2021) PHIs and other HIAs in the UK and Wales (Edmonds et al., 2022). In terms of practice and HIAP, the Brexit HIA featured in Chapter 5 is a clear example of mobilising cross sector stakeholders and disciplines to come together to discuss and consider the health, wellbeing and equity implications of subjects such as trade and bring a health lens to their work in practice (Petchey and Cresswell, 2021).

Diffusion

The goals for the dissemination of this research include advocacy for HIAP and HIA as a vehicle to drive it and improve health, wellbeing and equity outcomes, resources for the process and encourage capacity building and workforce enhancement. It is aimed at a number of cross sector and multidisciplinary audiences including academics, policy and decision makers across all sectors and public health agencies.

Many of the topics related to this thesis have been disseminated in a variety of channels. It has been presented at international and national research conferences, practice and policy webinars and events (Costa, 2022a; Green, 2022a, 2022b; WHO European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2021).