

Identifying and capturing intersectoral costs and benefits relating to sexual health

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SUMMARY

Identifying and capturing intersectoral costs and benefits relating to sexual health

Sexual health is a complex but comprehensive concept and is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as 'a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality'. Sexual health problems and interventions can generate wide-ranging health, social and economic implications (e.g., in form of costs and benefits), both within and beyond the health sector. Those costs and benefits that spill over to other sectors outside health are referred to as intersectoral costs and benefits (ICBs). The primary aim of this thesis was to identify and capture relevant ICBs relating to sexual health and to develop a sector-specific (cost) classification scheme that would categorise these ICBs into different (policy) sectors. An additional aim was to develop a consensus-based checklist for the critical appraisal of cost-of-illness (COI) studies to review and assess these studies (including the assessment of the choice of study perspective and the costs included in the analysis).

Chapter 1 outlined the rationale for the thesis as well as its overall aims and objectives.

Chapter 2 introduced the concept of sexual health in more depth, describing the wider remit and key elements relating to sexual health, including STIs and HIV, sexuality, and sexual rights; the epidemiological and economic burden of STIs and HIV; the role of and increasing demand for sexual health services; the impact of COVID-19 on sexual health service provision; and the processes of sexual health policy/decision-making.

Chapter 3 provided a brief overview of the key concepts relating to health economic studies and the importance of economic evidence for policy/decision-making in

public health and sexual health; the concept of COI studies and the four main types of full economic evaluations; the choice of perspective in economic analysis (e.g., healthcare, societal) which determines the costs (or resources) and benefits (or outcomes) to be included in the analysis; and the theoretical foundations of the different methodological choices for analysis.

Chapter 4 introduced the concept of ICBs in health economic studies assessing public health interventions; explained why the consideration of ICBs under a societal perspective is important; and outlined methodological challenges associated with capturing ICBs in economic evaluations. This chapter also presented an Editorial that identified and listed the broader societal impacts of COVID-19 on various sectors of society and demonstrated the growing importance of capturing these in health economic analyses.

Addressing the primary aim of this thesis, **Chapter 5** presented and summarised the findings from a systematic literature review that explored the intersectoral costs associated with STIs and HIV considered in COI studies and categorised these costs according to (policy) sectors. This chapter also illustrated the impact intersectoral costs related to STIs and HIV can have on the total cost burden.

Chapter 6 summarised the findings from a systematic literature review of economic evaluations of interventions relating to STIs, presenting relevant intersectoral costs identified in the review, categorising them by (policy) sector in form of a table. The chapter revealed that the inclusion of intersectoral costs as presented in this scheme can have an impact on cost estimates. Overall, both systematic literature reviews (Chapter 5 and 6) revealed that the intersectoral costs captured in these studies are mostly limited to a few cost sectors, predominantly patient/family costs, and paid productivity losses.

Chapter 7 revealed the findings from in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews with experts in sexual health, finding there are relevant ICBs for other areas of health (including reproductive health and mental health) and other sectors of society (including education and criminal justice). A sector-specific (cost) classification scheme was developed in this chapter based on the interview findings. The classification scheme can assist in guiding future comprehensive research and identifying and understanding the intersectoral impact when evaluating interventions in sexual health and when faced with policy decisions in this area.

The review of COI studies revealed there was lack of and important need for a standard critical appraisal tool to review and assess COI studies. Hence, a consensus-based checklist was developed in English for the critical appraisal of COI studies, using a six-step approach that involved a scoping review and key expert interviews, and is presented in **Chapter 8**.

Chapter 9 revealed the findings from in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews with experts exploring their views on the development of the proposed checklist for COI studies (in chapter 8). It explored expert perspectives on both the use and relevance of COI studies and of critical appraisal tools used for COI studies as well as their experience with existing critical appraisal tools. The same chapter discussed the controversy around COI studies to date.

Chapter 10 synthesised the evidence generated through the systematic literature reviews and the qualitative interviews with experts in sexual health and discussed the implications of the thesis findings for research and policy/decision-makers. Further, it reflected on the development and publication of the checklist for the critical appraisal of COI studies and its implications for users and (future) health economic research.