

Using conjoint analysis to validate SAGE: A tool to assess research engagement actions and research use in health policy

It is essential for those policies that are implemented, to be based on the best available evidence, to ensure their effectiveness. The present study describes the development and validation of SAGE, a measure that assesses the extent to which policymakers engaged with, and used research, in the development a health policy document or program. It contains multiple scoring categories broadly representing limited, moderate, and extensive research engagement (e.g., searching, generating, or appraising research) and research use (e.g., conceptual, instrumental, tactical, symbolic). The content of these scoring categories was derived from theoretical models and research on knowledge exchange, as well as in-depth interviews with policymakers. To validate these scoring categories, a conjoint analysis (CA) was conducted with individuals who had an in-depth understanding of both research and policy. Experts were presented with numerous profiles of research engagement/use and rated the extent to which each profile represented a comprehensive form of research engagement or use. The CA helped identify profiles representing extensive, moderate, and limited forms of research engagement and research use. These profiles were translated into the scoring categories, to rate the degree to which policy makers utilise research evidence in policy/program development. The advantage of the approach here is that expert opinion was combined with statistical techniques to develop a validated assessment of research engagement and use in health policy development. The tool can be used to measure the degree to which organisations utilise research in the development of policies, particularly those regarding implementation.