

How Capable are we at Evaluating Public Health Interventions?

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ABSTRACT

Complex public health interventions, including housing regeneration projects such as GoWell, often have such diverse outcomes that evaluation needs to overcome methodological challenges. Sen's 'capability approach' may provide the breadth of coverage required to evaluate public health interventions. According to Sen, wellbeing should be measured not according to what individuals actually do (functionings) but what they can do (capabilities). However, as some researchers have found, the entire capability set is not easily or directly observable (1). Anand et al (2) sought to measure capability by exploiting data from the British Household Panel Survey and other social surveys and arrived at a set of 65 indicators, which they tested via an online survey. While Anand's is not the only approach to measuring capabilities (see (3)), the survey design is practical and is also a generic approach and, much like SF-36, is a generic measure of health.

We sought to reduce and refine Anand et al's survey so as to be able to provide a summary measure of wellbeing and capability, negating the need to develop specific instruments for every evaluation of complex public health interventions. This paper offers commentary on the application of the capability approach and also details the approach used to reduce and refine a questionnaire for use in public health interventions. The results from the first stage of the project will be reported.

Key Words: evaluation, public health, capability approach