The importance of rights-based research on accountability in SRHR

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SRHM Webinar
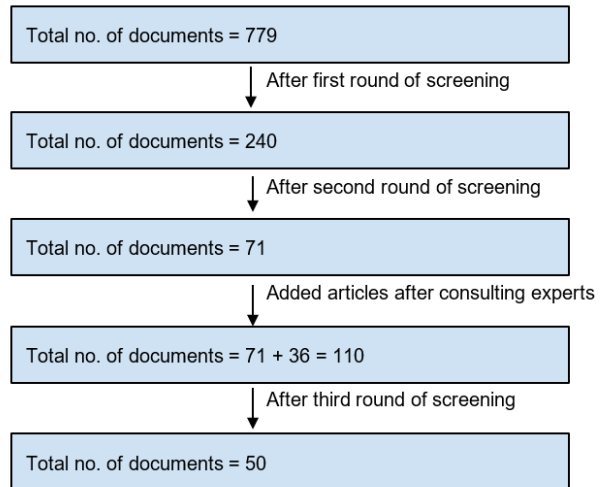17th May 2021

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Accountability deficit in SRHR

- SRHR is an integral part of human rights
- Constrained by various structural social, political, cultural and economic realities
- Deeply contested across various axes of power including but not limited to gender
- Involves examining the processes underlying SRH rights violations and deficiencies, to asking questions about why these occur
- Growing interest in accountability within the SRHR field, but often top down and not rights-based

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Method

- Key words:
  - Accountability key words
  - SRH key words
  - Rights key words

- Questions:
1. How has accountability been conceptualized/defined in studies that are rights based?
2. How has the rights lens been incorporated while defining the questions, methods, outcomes studied?
3. In what ways have researchers embedded accountability within the research process?

Total no. of documents = 779

→ After first round of screening

Total no. of documents = 240

→ After second round of screening

Total no. of documents = 71

→ Added articles after consulting experts

Total no. of documents = 71 + 36 = 110

→ After third round of screening

Total no. of documents = 50

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Conceptualizing Accountability

- Accountability is an essential component of human rights – responsibilities of the state to respect, protect, fulfil but also recognizes obligations of other actors

- Recognizes rights holders and duty bearers and sees a HRBA as one that empowers former to claim and latter to fulfil obligations

- Managerial understanding – limitations (Murthy and Klugman)

- Varying types of accountability – OHCHR Technical Guidance, Birkenhoff et al, Van Belle et al.

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Core principles that underpin accountability research in SRHR

- Interrogating power
- Accounting for context
- Using a systems approach
- Applying an equity lens

(Marston et al, Boydell et al, Schaaf et al, Van Belle et al)

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How have research questions/areas been defined keeping a rights lens in mind?

- Social Accountability
  - Is social accountability "effective"? What is its "impact"?
  - How do the strategies transform power relations between communities/women and systems/providers?
  - Influence of context – what strategies work in which circumstances, when and why?
  - Accountability within communities
- Health systems accountability
  - Effectiveness of internal accountability mechanisms – (clinical audits, patient feedback, MDR)
  - Structural and relational barriers to enforcing accountability
  - Pitfalls/unintended consequences

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How have research questions/areas been defined keeping a rights lens in mind?

- Legal accountability
    - The process and outcomes of litigation – legal strategy, lessons learnt etc
    - Barriers to seeking legal redress
    - Outcomes on practice/policy implementation/discourse and factors affecting this
- International accountability
    - Impact of international treaties/human rights law on domestic policy making
    - Analysis of reporting/accountability mechanisms
- Donor/private sector
    - Accountability of donors/ INGOs/ Global Health Cooperation - Accountability to donors vs communities, governance arrangements in the GHIs, Accountability of donors and INGOs in Humanitarian contexts
    - Accountability of private sector actors - Accountability concerns in PPP, Lack of accountability in private sector provision of services

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How have the methods incorporated a rights-based approach?

Approaches and methods

- Realist approach – what mechanisms underlie the workings of an accountability intervention and in which conditions do they bring about change
- Case studies – drawing out common lessons across different contexts or comparing different "cases" to understand role of context, some take a process view to examine an intervention over a longer period of time
- Ethnographic methods - to uncover organizational culture and social norms in institutions and an embedded exploration of strategies employed in accountability efforts
- Mixed methods – quantifying outcomes, complemented by qualitative methods to identify mechanisms by which change is brought about
- Content analysis – legal judgments, policies and guidelines, positions published by stakeholders

Outcomes

- Communities
- Strengthening of relationships between stakeholders
- Health system/provider changes
- Service utilization and health outcomes

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Accountability in the research process

- Accountability to communities - supporting the communities that they work with, and addressing community members' concerns and issues
- Examining and altering researcher power: who sets the research agenda, who decides what questions to ask, how to define impact
- Plurality of knowledge: Diversity of disciplines within research teams to alter prevailing power dynamics, fostering decolonial understandings of accountability, SRHR and change.
- Funding and conflict of interest

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What gaps remain?

- Overwhelming focus on social accountability, some on health systems and legal, but very little on other aspects of accountability especially political/democratic accountability, accountability of donors and private sector actors and effectiveness of international accountability mechanisms
- Insufficient research on accountability that challenges broader structural social and political concerns that have a bearing on SRHR
- Evidence is skewed towards looking at maternal and reproductive health, but not comprehensive SRHR
- Insufficient interrogation of equity in researching accountability deficits as well as impact of accountability strategies
- Evidence of "impact" focuses on bounded short term interventions but there is insufficient research on long term social movement based strategies

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Thank you

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