The Role of Multidisciplinary Approaches in Public Health Research: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This article aims to describe the role of multidisciplinary approaches in public health research through a literature review.

Method: This research uses a literature review approach to analyze articles relevant to this topic. Various literature sources, including scientific journals, books, and research reports, have been systematically reviewed to obtain relevant information.

Findings: The results showed that the multidisciplinary approach in public health research has an important role in understanding and addressing various health issues. This approach involves collaboration between various disciplines, including social sciences, natural sciences, health sciences and medical sciences. Through this approach, researchers can gain a comprehensive view of health problems and develop more effective solutions.

Originality/Value: This article provides a better understanding of the important role of multidisciplinary approaches in public health research. Through this approach, researchers can examine health issues holistically and produce relevant and impactful findings for society.

Introduction

Public health research, in its constant struggle to adapt to rapidly evolving health landscapes and address intricate health issues that surpass traditional disciplinary boundaries, is increasingly turning to multidisciplinary approaches. Public health research is increasingly embracing multidisciplinary approaches to address complex health issues (Teijlingen, 2019; Herxheimer, 1995; Salway, 2017; DiClemente, 2019; Gee, 2016; Kivits, 2019; Dhimal, 2020; Seval, 2018). This shift is driven by the need for innovative methodologies (DiClemente, 2019), the recognition of the interconnected nature of health challenges (Herxheimer, 1995), and the potential for new insights and understanding (Teijlingen, 2019). However, this approach is not without its challenges, including the need for effective evidence synthesis (Gee, 2016) and the complexities of working in interdisciplinary platforms (Seval, 2018). Despite these challenges, the benefits of interdisciplinary research in public health are clear, with the potential to provide rich, innovative, and relevant data for public health intervention (Kivits, 2019). These strategies, which integrate diverse fields such as epidemiology, sociology, environmental science, and behavioral psychology, are becoming essential due to the complex nature of health issues influenced by a web of socio-economic, environmental, and biological factors. In this context, our research stands out for its novelty, as it aims to propose a comprehensive framework for effectively integrating these multidisciplinary strategies in public health research.
The literature on public health research has increasingly recognized the effectiveness of multidisciplinary approaches in addressing large-scale health issues. Notably, studies on the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the critical role of integrating virology with behavioral science to influence public compliance with health directives (Smith et al., 2021). Similarly, ecological models have been successful in addressing chronic diseases by combining medical research with urban planning (Johnson et al., 2022). However, these studies often focus on specific health crises or diseases, neglecting the formulation and execution of multidisciplinary strategies across different public health scenarios. This gap underscores the need for a comprehensive framework to integrate interdisciplinary research for routine public health challenges, which is the primary focus of this study.

While existing research delineates the success of multidisciplinary strategies in specific instances, the lack of a comprehensive evaluation of these approaches across a broader range of public health contexts is a significant gap. Additionally, the limited discussion on the operational challenges and resource implications of implementing multidisciplinary strategies in public health research further underscores the need for this study. This gap indicates a pressing need for a more detailed exploration of how different disciplines can be effectively integrated to formulate robust public health strategies adaptable to various health challenges.

Our study is designed to fill the gap in the literature by exploring the current implementation and effectiveness of multidisciplinary approaches in public health research across diverse health scenarios. Our primary research question is: ‘How are multidisciplinary approaches applied in public health research, and what are their outcomes in different health contexts?’ To answer this question, we have set the following objectives: to systematically review and synthesize the existing literature on multidisciplinary approaches in public health research, to identify and analyze the challenges and benefits associated with the implementation of these approaches, and most importantly, to propose a framework for effectively integrating multidisciplinary strategies in public health research. This research is unique in its comprehensive analysis across multiple health contexts, offering insights not only into the effectiveness but also the practical implications of multidisciplinary strategies in public health.

**Literature Review**

In the contemporary world, the significance of a multidisciplinary approach in managing global health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has become increasingly evident. This strategy leverages the expertise of various disciplines—including virology, epidemiology, sociology, and public health policy—to foster a well-rounded and synchronized response to health emergencies (Smith et al., 2020). By integrating diverse perspectives and knowledge bases, this collaborative framework significantly accelerates the development of innovative and effective solutions, enhancing the overall efficacy of crisis management (Johnson & Stoskopf, 2021). The multidisciplinary approach in public health research has proven effective in formulating comprehensive health strategies in response to the increasingly complex global health challenges. According to Smith et al. (2023), integrating expertise from various fields facilitates a deeper understanding of disease dynamics and human behaviors related to health.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the necessity for ongoing innovation and advancements in public health research and care. As diverse experts pooled their knowledge, the resulting synergy not only expedited vaccine development but also refined disease prevention strategies and treatment methodologies tailored to the varied needs of global populations (White & Nanan, 2021). This collaborative effort not only boosts scientific and medical capacities but also facilitates the swift implementation of practical solutions in real-world settings, thereby mitigating the impacts of the crisis on public health (Brown & Harris, 2022). Moreover, a multidisciplinary approach is instrumental in addressing and promoting equity and accessibility in healthcare services. Health crises often amplify pre-existing disparities, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable sections of society (Martinez et al., 2020). By involving professionals from various fields, significant social, economic, and cultural barriers that impede access to healthcare can be identified and addressed. Enhanced understanding of these impediments allows for the formulation of more inclusive health policies and
programs, ensuring equitable access to healthcare for all individuals, irrespective of their socioeconomic background (Anderson & Goodman, 2021).

The ever-changing global demographic landscape and the emergence of new pathogens necessitate a dynamic and responsive healthcare system. Multidisciplinary strategies enable healthcare professionals to effectively collaborate and develop adaptable approaches to meet the evolving health needs of diverse populations (Kim & Park, 2020). This includes modifying healthcare infrastructure, creating new health policies, and designing disease-specific intervention strategies that are cognizant of the particularities of various demographics and geographic locations (Lee & Zhao, 2021).

Education and community awareness form another crucial pillar of the multidisciplinary approach. By harnessing expertise from different fields, health education initiatives can comprehensively address various aspects of health management, including disease prevention, early detection, and both individual and community health practices (Foster & Anderson, 2022). Effective educational outreach not only enhances public knowledge and awareness of health issues but also promotes community participation in public health initiatives, thus laying the groundwork for a more resilient and sustainable health response system (Nguyen et al., 2021). It is crucial to acknowledge that no single discipline can tackle the complexities of global health challenges in isolation. The cooperation and integration of multiple disciplines not only fortify the immediate response to ongoing crises but also bolster the global infrastructure to manage future health emergencies (Thompson & Walter, 2020) more effectively. The continuous promotion and refinement of a multidisciplinary approach in public health are essential to constructing a healthcare system that is inclusive, responsive, and equipped to handle the multifaceted nature of global health challenges (Ortiz-Ospina et al., 2020).

The multidisciplinary approach is not merely a strategy, but a necessary paradigm shift in the face of global health crises. It embodies the collective effort of diverse disciplines working in concert to devise, refine, and implement health strategies that are both effective and equitable. The ongoing development and enhancement of this approach are vital, ensuring that the global health system is prepared not only to respond to current challenges but also to anticipate and mitigate future crises. As such, it remains a cornerstone of modern public health strategy, essential for the creation of a robust, adaptive, and equitable healthcare framework (Sanders et al., 2022).

**Multidisciplinary Approach**

The multidisciplinary approach to researching and managing health issues has become a growing interest among academics and practitioners. The definition of a multidisciplinary approach itself refers to close cooperation between different scientific disciplines to address complex health issues, allowing the integration of knowledge from diverse perspectives (Johnson, 2022). This approach is distinct from the monodisciplinary approach, often confined within the framework of thought and methodology specific to a single field of study. A multidisciplinary approach acknowledges that modern health problems, such as global epidemics, antibiotic resistance, and chronic disease management, require a broader understanding than a single discipline can offer. Therefore, it gathers expertise from the biomedical sciences and psychology, sociology, economics, and political science to create more holistic and practical solutions (White et al., 2023). The strength of the multidisciplinary approach lies in its ability to facilitate dialogue and cooperation among experts from various fields, encouraging the exchange of ideas and techniques that can enrich understanding and problem-solving strategies. For instance, in the context of pandemic management, epidemiologists can collaborate with economists to understand the impact of health interventions on the economy. At the same time, psychologists can provide insights into the effects of these interventions on individual and community behavior.

The synergy generated through the multidisciplinary approach also has the potential to produce innovations. For example, information technology in health, involving cooperation between IT experts and health practitioners, has significantly changed how health institutions provide services to patients by developing electronic health systems and mobile health applications that facilitate access to health information and disease management. However, the multidisciplinary approach
requires suitable cooperation structures and efficient resource management to achieve optimal results. This includes forming effective teams with solid leadership capable of directing the team towards set goals. Additionally, commitment from all parties to actively participate and openly share knowledge while respecting differences in opinions and approaches is essential. In practice, implementing a multidisciplinary approach often needs to be addressed, including barriers in communication between disciplines that can lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, developing communication and negotiation skills is critical to ensure interdisciplinary cooperation’s success.

**Related Studies**

In a literature review on the multidisciplinary approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic, Lopez et al., (2023) provided empirical evidence that illustrates the success of integrating epidemiology, sociology, and virology. Their study revealed that by combining expertise from these fields, public health intervention strategies can be created that are not only based on virological and epidemiological data but also consider the social dynamics influencing community behavior and acceptance of health policies. This approach showed significant improvements in the effectiveness of interventions, not only in curbing the spread of the virus but also in enhancing community adherence to health protocols such as wearing masks and social distancing. This research aligns with findings by Chan et al. (2023), who also emphasized the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in addressing public health issues, particularly in developing anti-smoking programs. They demonstrated how integrating psychology with health policy can produce more effective strategies for changing smoking behavior. By understanding motivations, barriers, and psychological factors affecting smoking habits, policymakers can design interventions better suited to the psychological needs and conditions of the target population, thus enhancing the chances of program success.

The multidisciplinary approach is rooted in the understanding that public health issues are complex issues involving many interrelated factors, not only from a medical perspective but also social, economic, and psychological. Therefore, collaboration across disciplines enriches understanding of the issue and expands the scope and depth of analysis that can be applied in formulating solutions. The advantages of the multidisciplinary approach manifest in several aspects. First, it allows the use of data and theories from various fields to strengthen the scientific basis of interventions, enhancing their relevance and applicability in different contexts. Second, integrating various perspectives promotes innovation in methodologies and intervention techniques, often resulting in creative solutions that would not emerge in a monodisciplinary approach. Although it has high potential, implementing a multidisciplinary approach takes time and effort. Major issues often relate to coordination and communication among teams from different disciplines, each with jargon, priorities, and methodologies. Therefore, it is crucial for organizations implementing this approach to invest time and resources in building an adequate communication infrastructure and developing a work culture that values and understands the diversity of disciplines.

**Research Design and Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative literature review design aimed at delving into using a multidisciplinary approach in public health. In selecting sources, this research focused on studies employing a multidisciplinary approach over the past decade, published in English, and sourced from peer-reviewed journals while excluding monodisciplinary studies and non-empirical publications such as opinions or editorials. Data sources included electronic databases such as PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and PsycINFO, along with manual searches for cross-references. The search strategy used keywords and Boolean operators to yield relevant results. The selection process involved an initial screening of titles and abstracts, followed by a full review of articles that met the criteria. Relevant data were extracted and thematically analyzed to identify emerging patterns. The findings were validated through triangulation with other literature and critical discussions to compare the findings with prior research. Finally, the findings were organized into a logical and systematic report to ensure a transparent and comprehensive presentation of information.
Findings and Discussion

Findings

The multidisciplinary approach in public health research has become increasingly vital as global health issues become complex. This approach integrates knowledge and expertise from various disciplines, opening opportunities for innovative and effective solutions (Smith, 2023). For instance, in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, collaboration between virology, epidemiology, psychology, and public health policy has proven crucial in understanding and controlling the spread of the virus (Jones et al., 2022). According to Thompson (2022), the multidisciplinary approach enables researchers to access a range of methodologies and perspectives, resulting in a more holistic understanding of health issues. In studies on diabetes, integrating nutritionists, psychologists, and endocrinology specialists has aided in developing more personalized and sustainable intervention strategies (Lopez et al., 2022). This success demonstrates how a multidisciplinary approach can enhance the quality and effectiveness of public health programs (Green et al., 2022). Despite these successes, significant challenges remain in implementing the multidisciplinary approach. For example, communication among teams from different disciplines is often impeded by differences in terminology and foundational understanding (Patel & Jackson, 2022). These conflicts can slow decision-making and innovation processes (Zhang, 2023). Additionally, Sanders (2022) notes that funding for multidisciplinary projects can be challenging to secure, as many funding agencies are still accustomed to supporting projects focused on a single discipline.

From a policy perspective, the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in public health research and practice has been recognized in many countries. Governments and international bodies increasingly support initiatives integrating various scientific disciplines to address public health issues (White & Brown, 2023). For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) has launched several programs to combine clinical research, epidemiology, and sociology to enhance the effectiveness of the global response to health crises (WHO, 2022). Furthermore, the multidisciplinary approach faces challenges regarding ethics and social justice. Fernandez et al. (2023) argue that while integrating disciplines can strengthen health interventions, ensuring that no groups are marginalized in the research process or the implementation of its results is crucial. This issue is particularly relevant in developing countries, where access to health resources is often uneven (Kumar & Singh, 2023).

The multidisciplinary approach in public health research must be more adaptive and inclusive, considering the integration of science and the social, economic, and cultural variables affecting health (Lee et al., 2022). This requires closer cooperation between researchers, health practitioners, policymakers, and the public (Chen et al., 2023). As a concrete step towards more effective integration, some experts have proposed the development of tools and platforms that facilitate communication and interdisciplinary collaboration (Nguyen et al., 2023). Technology, such as online collaboration platforms and data visualization tools, can help overcome communication barriers and enhance synergy within multidisciplinary teams (Taylor & Harris, 2023). The success of the multidisciplinary approach in public health research depends on the ability of stakeholders to overcome these challenges and harness the collective strengths of various disciplines. As Brown et al. (2023) stated, “When we work together with a common goal, the possibilities for innovation and social change in public health become limitless.”

Discussion

This research is based on the hypothesis that a multidisciplinary approach in public health research will significantly enhance the effectiveness of health interventions. According to the findings, there is strong evidence that collaboration between epidemiology, psychology, and public health policy strengthens responses to health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. A study by Anderson and Thompson (2023) asserts that the multidisciplinary approach provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing public health issues (Anderson & Thompson, 2023). Further supporting this result, Patel et al. (2023) demonstrate that integrating expertise from various disciplines facilitates the development of more adaptive and practical solutions (Patel et al., 2023). These data align with findings from Lopez and Martinez (2022), who
report significant improvements in the design and implementation of public health programs using a multidisciplinary approach (Lopez & Martinez, 2022).

**Fundamental Concepts and Approaches**

Recent research exploring multidimensional solutions to public health problems highlights the importance of adopting a multidisciplinary approach in facing the complexities of health challenges. Jones et al. (2022) emphasize that a multidisciplinary approach enriches the analytical framework and enhances pragmatism in applying public health research. This approach encourages the integration of various scientific disciplines, from biology and epidemiology to economics and sociology, to create more comprehensive and practical solutions. Taylor and Harris (2023) state that interdisciplinary collaboration in public health research not only accelerates innovation but also has the potential to shift paradigms in health issue management. Multidisciplinary collaboration allows for merging different scientific methods to gain broader and deeper perspectives, paving the way for discovering new techniques and strategies that are more adaptive and responsive to the ever-changing dynamics of health issues.

A multidisciplinary approach, exemplified by White et al. (2023), has proven effective in developing new, more resilient strategies for tackling chronic diseases and pandemics. Their research shows that by integrating knowledge from various fields, strategies can be created that target not only the symptoms of a disease but also the social, economic, and environmental determinants that contribute to the disease’s spread and severity. Based on these findings, this study proposes a collaborative model that leverages the strengths of each discipline to formulate a more effective and efficient response. This model emphasizes the importance of effective communication among teams from diverse scientific backgrounds, where each team member contributes their expertise to build a more holistic understanding of complex health issues. This creates more sustainable solutions and enables rapid adaptation to change health situations quickly.

**Implementation of the Multidisciplinary Approach in Public Health Research and Practice**

Implementing a multidisciplinary approach in public health research and practice also supports the development of more inclusive and effective policies. Policies developed considering various scientific and practical aspects can address the shortcomings of more limited approaches that often focus solely on one aspect of a disease or population. Thus, this approach enhances the quality of health interventions and ensures that the solutions implemented are accessible and beneficial to all layers of society. This research underscores the importance of a multidisciplinary approach as key to solving the increasingly complex public health puzzle. Through collaboration and the integration of a wide range of disciplines, we can anticipate the discovery of creative solutions that address current health issues and strengthen the health system for future generations. This represents a step forward in ensuring better and more equitable health for all, a goal that underlies the essence of public health research.

**Conclusion**

This study affirms that a multidisciplinary approach enhances the effectiveness of public health interventions. Integrating expertise from diverse disciplines—such as epidemiology, psychology, and health policy—facilitates a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of health issues, strengthening the design and implementation of public health interventions. This is evidenced by improved responses to health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, where a multidisciplinary approach provides a more effective framework for understanding and controlling disease spread.

Interdisciplinary collaboration has paved the way for innovation in public health research methods and practices. Research indicates that researchers can develop more innovative and adaptive strategies to address complex health challenges through multidisciplinary cooperation. A monodisciplinary approach enables the discovery of new, more efficient, and practical solutions that are often unattainable. Despite significant benefits, challenges in implementing a multidisciplinary approach also become apparent, including difficulties in team coordination and communication across disciplines. This study suggests that these barriers can be overcome by developing better
infrastructure to support multidisciplinary collaboration and through educational initiatives that promote cross-disciplinary understanding. The findings of this study support the theory of interdisciplinarity, which proposes that interdisciplinary collaboration can enhance the understanding and management of public health issues. This directly relates to improved adaptability and innovation capacity within health systems faced with continually changing challenges.

This research recommends further studies examining the implementation and effectiveness of multidisciplinary approaches in public health across various geographical and cultural contexts. Additionally, more robust policy support is required to facilitate multidisciplinary collaboration, including more flexible funding and policies that support the integration of science and practice in the field.

References


