

# Evaluations of health research capacity strengthening: a review of the evidence

Donald Cole<sup>1</sup>, Ritsuko Kakuma<sup>1</sup>, Sharon Fonn<sup>2</sup>, Chimaraoke Izugbara<sup>3</sup>, Margaret Thorogood<sup>4</sup>, Imelda Bates<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Toronto, Canada; <sup>2</sup>University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg; <sup>3</sup>African Population and Health Research Centre, Nairobi; <sup>4</sup>University of Warwick, UK; <sup>5</sup>Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, UK



## Summary

- Although there has been significant investment in strengthening research capacity in low or middle income countries (LMICs) little is known about how to measure the effectiveness of this investment
- We reviewed publications about health research capacity strengthening (HRCS) programmes to understand how authors had evaluated effectiveness
- 593 publications** described evaluations of HRCS projects; **only 4 (0.7%) were primary studies from LMICs**
- Despite the close link between research and improvements in health, **there are very few high quality, detailed evaluations of capacity strengthening projects in LMICs**

## Introduction

- Capacity strengthening efforts are often incorporated into projects and both **funders and recipients need evidence of the effectiveness** of these efforts
- We **reviewed published literature** to synthesize information about the design, setting, type, measurement indicators and impact of HRCS projects in LMICs

## Methods

- We searched 9 databases (to March 2010) using 22 search terms to identify papers that focused on HRCS
- We used a broad definition of HRCS (e.g. courses, mentoring, collaborations, networks)
- We **analysed studies describing primary data collected in LMICs**, divided into a) 'one-off' cross-sectional assessments and b) 'before' and 'after' evaluations of an intervention.
- Data was double-extracted and entered onto a pre-piloted form based on published frameworks
- Study quality was assessed using a published checklist

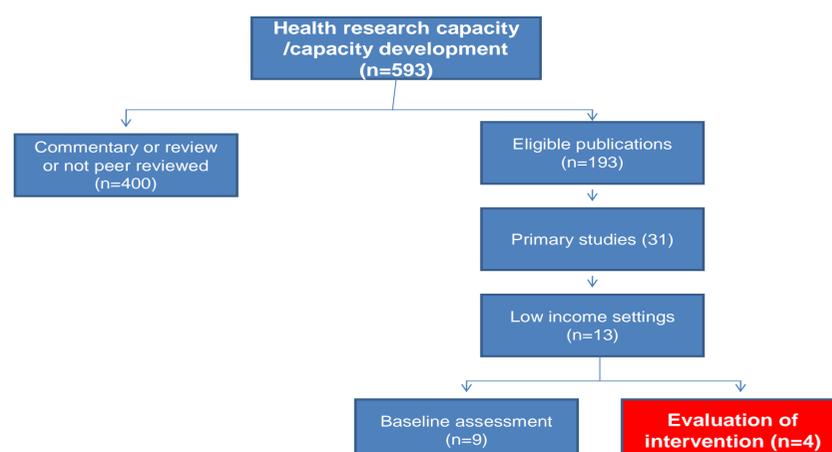
## Results

- 593 publications focussed on HRCS; (31 (5.0%) were primary studies, 13 (2.2%) were from LMICs (figure).
- Only 4 (0.7%) studies from Ghana (2), Vietnam and Pakistan met our criteria for a primary study in LMICs that evaluated a HRCS intervention
- Quality of the 4 studies was variable. All specified objectives and outcome measures, and stressed the importance of engaging senior managers in developing research capacity. None had a comparator group; two were retrospective and two used validated tools



Health research capacity strengthening team, Kumasi, Ghana

Figure – Selection of publications for analysis



## Discussion

- Published literature on HRCS is dominated by recounting of programs and experiences with little published evaluation.
- Much more rigorous and substantial evidence is needed to inform robust evaluations of effectiveness of HRCS efforts