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The institutional effect on public health: an Albanian survey analysis

Abstract

The public health sector is affected by various factors that contribute to or inhibit its effectiveness. Successful public policy in health care must address such challenges as employment, income, facilities and equipment, as well as medical staff training and improvement. The research on which this article is based analyses the link between media, democracy, corruption, labour migration and the public health care system in Albania through analysis of data from the World Bank, Heritage Foundation and the IMF, as well as primary data, and using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Our conclusions show that the public health care system in Albania is negatively affected by corruption. The media and democracy both have a positive impact on public health care, while the export of professionals to other countries has a negative effect on the health care system. Albania is one of the poorest economies in Europe and the health care system needs major reform in order to eliminate corruption and reduce the outwards migration of professional workers.

Keywords: *public health, Albania, analysis, survey, corruption, labour migration*

Introduction

The public health care (PHC) system of a nation has the core mandate to give its citizens affordable, quality and accessible services. An excellent health care service involves having a significant impact on the social, physical and environmental factors that contribute to a better PHC (European Commission, 2014). Medical reforms are a key strategy applied by many countries, including Albania, to improve their health care; and, according to its *Albania 2014 Progress Report* (European Commission, 2014), Albania has been granted recognition for its progress in reforms.

It is imperative that a public health system can identify the needs of the population and develop appropriate services that respond to those needs. In the management of the health care system in Albania, the Ministry of Health is making efforts to improve public health in the country. Albania is part of those central and east European countries that have adopted an economic model which has resulted in administrative changes in health care institutions in the public sector, largely in response to the resulting challenges and factors affecting PHCs. However, an early conclusion is that:

> Health reforms which were initiated more recently are typically more fragmented with pilots and local initiatives but are not consistently implemented within national policies. (Public Health, 2003)

In this article, the main focus is the impact of variables such as media, democracy, corruption and the export of labour on the PHC in Albania. Mainly, public health care in Albania is influenced by a mix of factors which lie outside the system itself.

This research note focuses not only on the health care system in Albania and its reforms, but also on the way important variables or factors affect public health care in Albania. The hypothesis of the study is:

H1: Factors such as corruption and the export of labour have a negative impact on the PHC in Albania

H2: The media and democracy have a positive effect on the implementation of reforms in the PHC in Albania

Problem statement

A brief background of Albania will put into perspective the public health care issues that will be addressed in this article. Albania has about 58% of its population living in urban areas (Heritage Foundation, 2015). In the past, there has been substantial emigration to neighbouring countries, with people seeking better living conditions as well as employment. The country is divided into twelve prefectures and 36 districts that are further divided into communes headed by an elected local authority leader. The main aim of the government is to decentralise power to these local authorities and, among these efforts at decentralisation, the government has also decentralised public health care.

Albania is still one of the poorest nations in Europe. It is not easy to determine the GDP of the country since there is an extensive informal economy but, according to the World Bank, the per capita GDP of Albania in 2014 was $9 506 (Heritage Foundation, 2015). Meanwhile, public health care is affected by corruption and some facilities offer services that are rather poor.

Albania shows potential for improvements in its PHC, as well as in the overall standard of living, but still faces high infant mortality rates as well as morbidity (Government of Albania, 2001).[1] The birth rate has, furthermore, also been decreasing. Meanwhile, chronic diseases such as cancer have been on the increase, coupled with the cardio-vascular diseases that have been the main cause of mortality. Accidents have also been a significant contributor of death in the country. The consumption of alcohol and tobacco is on the increase, leading to more cases of lifestyle diseases. There has been an improvement in vaccination programmes and these have led to a decline in the prevalence of vaccine-preventable diseases. An increase in the use of family planning has resulted in a decline in the number of abortions.

From this background, it is apparent that the public health system has made major strides towards the improvement of health care, but that there are still many challenges brought about by factors which are crippling the reform effort. Some of the major factors are corruption and the export of professional workers where we have

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1   Albania is generally improving in aspects of socio-economic and health factors.

already noted that the country has been experiencing an emigration of people in the search for better opportunities in neighbouring countries.

Research questions and the purpose of the study

In a bid to elaborate on the problem statement and provide direction for the research, questions for the research have been developed which address pertinent questions on the topic and are intended to be useful in guiding the research process. The research questions we have developed are as follows:

RQ1: What is the impact of the media in improving PHC in Albania?

RQ2: How does corruption affect service delivery in public health facilities in Albania?

RQ3: What is the effect of democracy on public health in Albania?

RQ4: How does the export of professionals through outwards migration to neighbouring countries affect the quality of health care in Albania?

Our study aims to establish the links between our independent variables (media, corruption, democracy and the export of labour) and the public health system in Albania.

According to Maranaj (2010), the Ministry of Health in Albania is changing the traditional role of 'health directorates' to a policy and reform-based government-led entity that is geared towards leadership in health care policy and the implementation of effective strategies. This Technical Paper explores the health care system in Albania and identifies the factors that affect its operations, among which the financing of health care is a major aspect in the Albanian public health care system:

The main public health system financing entities are the Ministry of Health (MoH) and Health Insurance Institute (HII). (Maranaj, 2010: 7)

Analysis of the data which reveals the pertinent issues in the public health care system in Albania will be instrumental in establishing solutions to the problems affecting the sector. In addition, this research analyses the correlation between the factors influencing the public health care system and the reforms which have been implemented by the government in the decentralisation of health care in the bid to make improvements to the functioning of the system. From a study of these factors, recommendations on the sorts of sound strategies that may assist the PHC deal with the challenges that it faces, such as corruption and labour exports, will be discussed.

Research methods

This research study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. This mixed approach to the research methodology is effective in gathering and

analysing information and data from various sources, including the World Bank, the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Heritage Foundation and the IMF.

The research design is an extremely important element in any scientific inquiry. According to Maxwell (2007) and Hall (2008), the research methodology constitutes the instruments deployed to seek answers to the research questions. Furthermore, Marczyk, DeMatteo and Festinger (2010) point out that research design is important in establishing reliable answers to the problems addressed in the research paper.

In this research study, the researchers have, in addition to the documentation analysis referred to above, also used surveys to gather primary data from different public health care facilities (Presser, 2004). This data was analysed using SPSS and conclusions drawn from these results.
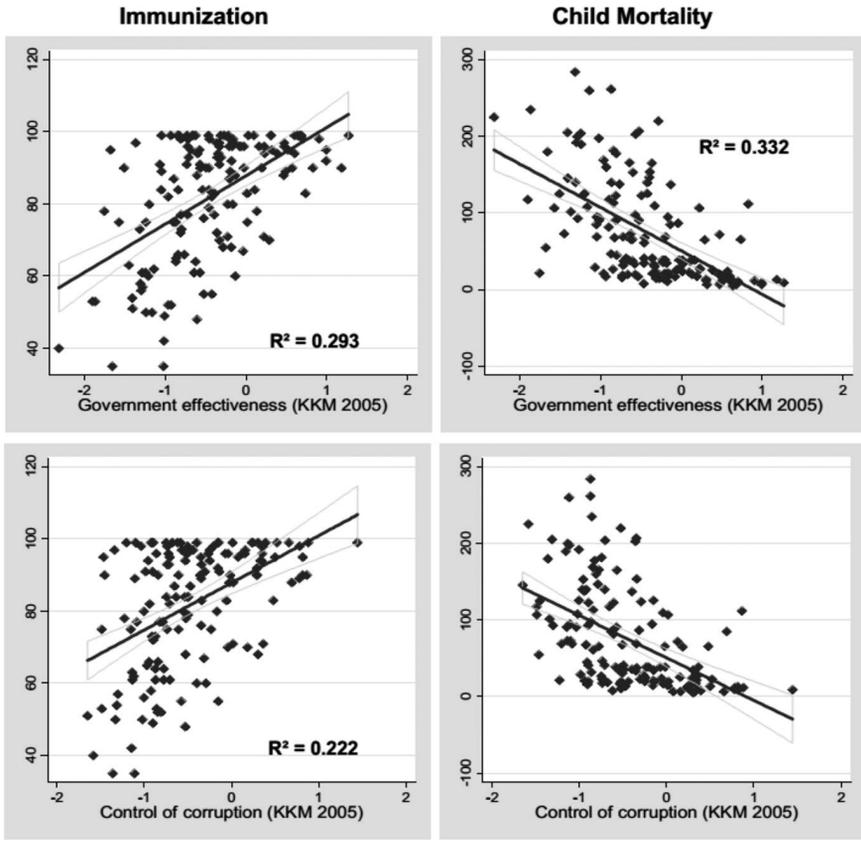
Findings

In this section, data from various sources are analysed to identify our conclusions and recommendations.

Impact of corruption and labour exports on public health care in Albania

The data collected from public officials and the business community, and the published information on the World Bank website, indicate that corruption indices and government effectiveness correlate with poor outcomes in public health care (see Figure 1). Additionally, other sources have confirmed that corruption levels correlate with poor PHC outcomes (Transparency International, 2013; Lewis, 2006).

Figure 1 – Correlation between government effectiveness and the control of corruption with the public health care system

The percentage of the population that perceive corruption to be rampant in public health care in Albania is about 60%, showing that this is a serious problem.

Democracy and its impact on public health care in Albania

Democracy in Albania is a vital aspect affecting the entire country as well as the public health care sector. Democracy is measured in myriad ways, with economic freedom being one of the main methods. According to the 2015 Index of Economic Freedom, Albania is ranked 63rd in the world with an economic freedom score of 65.7 (Heritage Foundation, 2015).

The freedom index shows that there have been great improvements since 2005 in Albania in many of the component indicators, such as trade freedom, business free-

dom, the rule of law and open markets. This has had a positive impact on the PHC system, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Democracy score of Albania since 2005

	2005	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**
Electoral process	3.75	3.50	4.00	4.00	3.75	3.75	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.00
Civil society	3.25	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Independent media	4.00	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
National democratic governance	4.25	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.50	4.75	4.75	5.00	4.75
Local democratic governance	3.25	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	3.00	3.25	3.25	3.50	3.50
Judicial framework and independence	4.50	4.25	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.75	4.75	4.75
Corruption	5.25	5.25	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.25	5.25
Democracy score	4.04	3.79	3.82	3.82	3.82	3.93	4.04	4.14	4.25	4.18

Source: Freedom House (2005), cited in Gipali (2014)

Our investigation also involved an assessment of a series of statements seeking to highlight internal consistencies and overall reliability. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The sample size was eighty, with all the respondents being stakeholders in the public health care system of Albania.

The items under research were related to the research questions but broken down into several areas in which participants were required to state their view using the Likert scale. The following is the SPSS output for the data.

Table 2 – Item analysis from SPSS output

		If Item Deleted	Item Total Statistics	If Item Deleted	Item Total correction	Multiple correction	If Item Deleted
N	Valid	80	81	80	80	80	80
	Missing	1	0	1	1	1	1
Mean		25.526387		24.432541	.547803	.525703	.599915
Std. Error of Mean		.0555353		.1459411	.0096271	.0106867	.0136182
Median		25.456000		24.681400	.556850	.520000	.582700
Mode		25.1250		23.2748[a]	.5351	.5000[a]	.6454[a]
Std. Deviation		.4967226		1.3053373	.0861074	.0955844	.1218047
Variance		.247		1.704	.007	.009	.015
Skewness		.213		-.713	-.358	.608	.310
Std. Error of Skewness		.269		.269	.269	.269	.269
Kurtosis		1.793		-.417	-.298	1.647	-.284
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.532		.532	.532	.532	.532
Range		2.9825		5.0152	.4044	.5676	.5443
Minimum		24.0075		21.4660	.3476	.3116	.3459
Maximum		26.9900		26.4812	.7520	.8792	.8902
Sum		2042.1110		1954.6033	43.8243	42.0562	47.9932
Percentiles	25	25.230000		23.504700	.478373	.463398	.500000
	50	25.456000		24.681400	.556850	.520000	.582700
	75	25.788625		25.588325	.612150	.584225	.661415
	100	26.990000		26.481200	.752000	.879200	.890200

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance
					Stat.	Std. Error		
If Item deleted	80	2.9825	24.008	26.99	25.5264	.05554	.4967226	.247
If Item deleted	80	.5443	.3459	.8902	.599915	.01362	.1218047	.015
Valid N (lstwise)	80							

Alpha

N=80, Mean=0.5999, Max=0.8902, min=0.3459, SD=0.1218, Variance=0.015

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient value is 0.8902, showing that the internal consistency of the items is high.

Impact of the media on public health care in Albania: results from the questionnaire

It is evident from the results to the questionnaire that the media has a tremendous impact on the public. By extension, it is instrumental in sensitising the public to

health care reforms; a conclusion which is also supported by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2015). The impact of this may be seen in the improvement of community participation in health care programmes in the country.

Conclusions

From the data and analysis, it is plausible to conclude that the PHC system in Albania is faced with myriad challenges. There is a positive correlation between government effectiveness and public health care, showing that the government's efforts to improve public health care are yielding results. On the contrary, there is an inverse correlation between public health care and corruption. This indicates that corruption is crippling efforts to improve public health.

A study by Gipali (2014) shows that the democracy score for Albania has improved on previous years, reaching 4.18 in 2014. Similarly, health care provision in public facilities has improved as a result of greater freedom and democracy in the country. The media is doing a tremendous job in sensitising the public, and this has boosted community participation subsequent to a positive correlation between the media and reforms to public health.

This research study recommends that the government of Albania invest more in improving the public health care system. This will make it more affordable and would also improve the quality of services offered within public health care facilities.

Another recommendation is that the Albanian government should take more stringent measures to reduce and eradicate the corruption that is negating the progress made in improving public health care.

Finally, the government should support the media in the campaign to sensitise the public to the ongoing reforms and demonstrate how community participation could boost such efforts and make the public health care sector more vibrant.

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Annex: Research questionnaire

Name of respondent	
Profession	
Company / Organisation	

Gender of respondent (tick where applicable)

a)   Male   ▬▬
b)   Female   ▬▬

Age or respondent (tick one)

a)   15 years and below   ▬▬
b)   16-20 years   ▬▬

c) 21-30 years
d) 31-50 years
e) 51 years and above

Statement	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
The media plays a huge role in improving public health care in Albania					
The media promotes activities initiated by the health care department					
There is rampant corruption in the public health system in Albania					
You or a person close to you has witnessed corruption in the Albanian public health sector					
You have seen the effects of corruption in the public health system in Albania					
The level of democracy in Albania has increased over the last year					
Public health care has improved as a result of democracy in Albania					
The impact of democracy has led to public health reforms in Albania					
You have witnessed or have heard about an Albanian worker migrating to another country for better opportunities					
The public health sector needs more medical professionals yet some have migrated to other countries					