What is the impact of reporting guidelines in Public Health journals in Europe? The strange case of STROBE, CONSORT and PRISMA statements

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Background

Most public health research is observational. Moreover, the use of systematic reviews and meta-analyses in this field is robust.

But, while in clinical fields and epidemiology the use of reporting guidelines is common, this is often inadequate in public health, and this hampers the assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and of a study's generalizability.

The aim of this workshop is to present the main statements concerning the reporting of observational, trial and systematic review, i.e., the STROBE, CONSORT and PRISMA statements. Moreover, the workshop will present data on the implementations of these statements in Public Health journals published in Europe

The use of STROBE, CONSORT and PRISMA statements for public health research

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In order to improve the research quality and impact, the public health researchers should be aware of future requirements of reporting guidelines at the very beginning of their study. In the last 10 years, several reporting guidelines have been developed, for reporting observational, trial and systematic review. The underlining theme to enhance the understanding and interpretation of the studies that may be difficult for the reader if relevant information is not described or poorly presented.

The STROBE statement (Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology; http://www.strobe-statement.org/) is concerning observational studies. This is a checklist of 22 issues that should be considered in reporting observational studies. You can find the STROBE guidelines at the end of this editorial. Very recently, an extension of STROBE concerning Molecular epidemiology was developed, STrengthening the Reporting of OBservational studies in Epidemiology - Molecular Epidemiology (STROBE-ME). This provides 17 additional items, including issues such as collection, handling and storage of biological samples; laboratory methods, validity and reliability of biomarkers; specificities of study design; and ethical considerations. While the CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials) statement is used worldwide to
improve the reporting of randomized, controlled trials, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement is concerning the systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The last statement is a development of the QUOROM (QUality Of Reporting Of Meta-analysis) Statement, a reporting guideline published in 1999, -there have been several conceptual, methodological, and practical advances regarding the conduct and reporting of systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

The use of STROBE, CONSORT and PRISMA statements in public health journals in Europe

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Among Journals of Public Health published in Europe, 3 journals explicitly strongly recommend the use of STROBE statement (International Journal Public Health, Italian Journal of Public Health, Rev Esp Salud Publica), 1 the CONSORT statement and 2 the PRISMA statement. The clarity and transparency of these reports, however, is not optimal. Poor reporting of observational, randomized trials and systematic reviews in public health diminishes their value to clinicians, policy makers, and other users. An agreement on the use of these guidelines at the European level could improve the quality of the papers published on Public Health journals in Europe.