

Understanding assessor behaviour: a Health Behaviour Theory model of factors influencing assessment practice in Southern contexts

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Abstract

Background: Interventions to enhance the learning effects of assessment cannot take place without the assessor. Before assessment practice may be changed, first the how and why of assessor behaviour needs to be understood. This study was interested in using Health Behaviour Theory (HBT) to explore the factors that influence assessment practice in varied low-income ‘Southern’ contexts.

Summary of work: Thirty-one clinician-educators responsible for designing and implementing assessment were interviewed in South Africa and Mexico.

Results: Interacting personal and contextual factors positively and negatively influencing assessor behaviour were identified. These included perceived vulnerability and consequential magnitude of assessment in/actions (impact appraisal); assessment-related response efficacy, costs and value attached to expected outcomes (response appraisal); attitudes and perceived self-efficacy towards assessment; normative assessment beliefs and motivation to comply (interpersonal factors); assessment-related events and interventions, access to assessment information, products, services and facilities, and institutional assessment culture (physical and organisational environment); and the distal context in which assessment takes place. Assessment intention appeared to be mediated by personal competency and environmental affordances and constraints.

Discussion: A model of assessor behaviour was developed. While previous research has typically explored factors in isolation, this study used HBT to describe and explain assessment practice systematically and coherently. These findings add a contextual perspective to understanding assessment practice, while resonating with and extending existing work that is predominantly emanates from high-income ‘Northern’ contexts. Future research will explore the utility of this model for targeted (multi-factorial) and more effective (multi-level) faculty development and institutional change.

Conclusions: HBT offers a compelling theoretical framework for understanding, and changing, assessor behaviour.

References (maximum three)

Cilliers, F., Schuwirth, L., & van der Vleuten, V. (2015). Health behaviour theories: a conceptual lens to explore behaviour change. *Researching Medical Education*, 141-153.