Glasnovic A. Book review: Rudan I, Adeloye D, Song P (Eds). Global health metrics: The GHERG approach. Edinburgh: International Society of Global Health, 2024, pp. 1–261. (In English) ISBN 978-1-7385104-1-2. *JoGHNP*. Published online December 22, 2024. doi:10.7189/001c.159237

VIEWPOINTS

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[1] Journal of Global Health Neurology and Psychiatry

Keywords: Global Health Metrics, Burden of Disease, Epidemiology, Childhood Pneumonia, Non-communicable Diseases

https://doi.org/10.7189/001c.159237

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Global Health Metrics: The GHERG Approach, edited by Igor Rudan, Davies Adeloye, and Peige Song, is an intellectually ambitious and methodologically rich contribution to the evolving science of global health metrics. Positioned at the intersection of epidemiology, data science, and global policy, this volume presents a collection of high-quality systematic analyses that offers a coherent philosophy of how global health metrics should be generated, validated, and used. It is a reflection on more than a decade of work by the Global Health Epidemiology Reference Group (GHERG) and a forward-looking proposal for a transparent, collaborative, and scientifically grounded approach to understanding the burden of disease worldwide.

The central idea underpinning the book is that accurate estimates of disease burden are more than mere academic exercises. They are essential tools that shape global health priorities, guide investment decisions, and ultimately save lives. The editors frame global health metrics as a "big data" discipline, comparable in its trajectory to fields such as genomics, where the aggregation and analysis of vast datasets drive discovery. Yet they are also careful to highlight the limitations of this analogy. Unlike genomic data, which can be generated systematically and at scale, global health data remain deeply uneven, fragmented, and often biased. This recognition leads to the book's most distinctive contribution: the proposal of an open, academic, crowd-sourced model of evidence generation.

The early chapters lay out this conceptual foundation with clarity and conviction. Drawing on the legacy of the Child Health Epidemiology Reference Group (CHERG), the authors propose GHERG as a voluntary, international collaboration of independent researchers committed to improving disease burden estimates through transparency, replication, and methodological rigor. The emphasis on "academic crowdsourcing" is particularly compelling. Rather than relying on centralized data repositories

or proprietary models, GHERG seeks to mobilize dispersed knowledge, including unpublished datasets, grey literature, and region-specific studies that are often overlooked in large-scale analyses. This approach directly addresses one of the most persistent challenges in global health metrics: the existence of "gap areas" where data are scarce, outdated, or unreliable. By focusing on these gaps, GHERG positions itself as a complementary force to existing institutions engaged in global health metrics that strengthens the overall evidence base and provides necessary replication to strengthen the confidence in the current estimates that are being used.

The book's empirical core consists of a series of systematic reviews and meta-analyses covering a wide range of diseases and conditions, from childhood pneumonia and maternal infections to chronic diseases such as COPD, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, and neurological disorders. The breadth of topics reflects the ambition of the GHERG initiative to address global health across the life course and across diverse epidemiological contexts. Each chapter follows a rigorous methodological framework, typically involving comprehensive literature searches, careful assessment of study quality, and the use of statistical models to generate global and regional estimates.

One of the most striking features of these analyses is their emphasis on transparency. The authors consistently provide detailed descriptions of data sources, inclusion criteria, modelling assumptions, and limitations. This commitment to openness stands in contrast to an approach to large-scale modelling efforts where access to input data and methods would be more restricted. By making their methods accessible and reproducible, the contributors to this volume reinforce the principle that scientific credibility depends both on the sophistication of models and the ability of independent researchers to verify and replicate results.

The chapter on childhood pneumonia, for example, illustrates both the strengths and the challenges of the GHERG approach. Pneumonia remains a leading cause of child mortality globally, yet estimating its true burden is fraught with methodological difficulties. The authors carefully dissect these challenges, including the lack of standardized case definitions, variability in study design, and the inherent limitations of data sources such as verbal autopsies. They also highlight the complexity of attributing disease burden to specific pathogens, given the overlapping clinical presentations and the limitations of diagnostic methods. By systematically addressing these issues, the chapter provides updated estimates and offers a valuable methodological roadmap for future research.

Similar strengths are evident in other chapters, particularly those addressing non-communicable diseases. The analyses of COPD, rheumatoid arthritis, and type 1 diabetes demonstrate how systematic reviews and meta-analyses can be used to generate estimates in contexts where routine surveillance data are limited. These chapters underscore the importance of integrating

diverse data sources, including studies published in non-English languages and data from under-represented regions. The inclusion of such sources is a key strength of the GHERG approach, as it helps to mitigate the biases that arise when global estimates are based primarily on data from high-income countries.

Another notable contribution of the book is its critical engagement with the concept of "big data" in global health. While acknowledging the potential of large datasets and advanced analytical techniques, the authors caution against the assumption that more data automatically lead to more accurate estimates. They point out that if the underlying data are systematically biased or unrepresentative, increasing their volume may simply amplify existing errors. This insight is particularly relevant in the context of global health, where data availability varies dramatically across regions and where the populations most affected by disease are often those least represented in datasets.

The book also addresses the issue of uncertainty in a thoughtful and detailed manner. Rather than presenting estimates as definitive, the authors emphasize the importance of uncertainty ranges and the limitations of available data. This approach reflects a mature understanding of the epistemological challenges inherent in global health metrics and reinforces the need for humility in interpreting results. At the same time, the authors argue convincingly that imperfect data should not be a reason for inaction. Even with uncertainty, well-constructed estimates can provide valuable guidance for policy and resource allocation.

A particularly important theme that emerges throughout the volume is the role of replication in scientific progress. The editors argue that independent estimates produced by different groups should not become a source of confusion, but rather be seen a strength of the field. When multiple approaches converge on similar results, confidence in those estimates increases. Conversely, discrepancies between estimates can highlight areas where further research is needed. In this sense, the GHERG approach contributes to a more dynamic and self-correcting scientific ecosystem.

The book's policy relevance is also noteworthy. By linking methodological discussions to real-world implications, the authors make a compelling case for the importance of accurate health metrics in shaping global health priorities. Estimates of disease burden influence decisions about funding, intervention strategies, and health system design. Inaccurate estimates can lead to misallocation of resources and missed opportunities to save lives. By improving the quality and transparency of these estimates, the GHERG approach has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of global health interventions.

In addition to its strengths, the book also raises important questions about the future of global health metrics. The reliance on voluntary collaboration and academic goodwill, while admirable, may face challenges in terms of sustainability and coordination. Ensuring consistent methodological standards across diverse contributors is another potential difficulty. However, these challenges are acknowledged by the authors and are part of the broader conversation about how best to organize global health research in an increasingly complex and data-rich environment.

From a broader perspective, *Global Health Metrics: The GHERG Approach* can be seen as both a scientific work and a statement of values. It advocates for transparency, collaboration, inclusivity, and methodological rigor in a field that has profound implications for human well-being. By emphasizing the importance of filling data gaps, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, the book aligns itself with the broader goals of equity and social justice in global health.

In conclusion, this volume is a significant and timely contribution to the field of global health metrics. It combines rigorous empirical research with thoughtful methodological reflection and a clear vision for the future. For researchers, it offers a valuable resource on methods and data sources. For policymakers, it provides insights into the strengths and limitations of the estimates that inform their decisions. And for the global health community as a whole, it presents a compelling argument for a more open, collaborative, and transparent approach to understanding and addressing the burden of disease.

Submitted: December 15, 2024 BST. Accepted: December 17, 2024 BST. Published: December 22, 2024 BST.