Reviewer's report

Title: Sources of community health worker motivation: A qualitative study in Morogoro Region, Tanzania

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Reviewer: saji gopalan

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Sources of community health worker motivation: A qualitative study in Morogoro Region, Tanzania
Jesse A. Greenspan, Shannon A. McMahon, Joy Chebet, Maurus Mpunga, David Urassa, Peter J. Winch
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Review Report
Overall Comment
Overall this particular manuscript is based on a simple and a mild exploration of the sources of the motivation of 20 CHWs to perform in a Tanzania setting. The manuscript is well readable (except the objectives of the study, the recruitment of respondents and the results section). It definitely adds to the global knowledge base on CHWs.

Given the importance of the topic, the design of the study (especially selection of CHWs), postulation of research question, description of study findings and recommendations could have been more structured to make it more useful for the global audience and policy-implications.

It is not clear how did this study link to the evaluation of the MCH program in Morogoro. If it was part of an evaluation, the presented data seem to be quite limited in terms of recruitment of respondents, how CHWs fell into scope of program evaluation, essential background information on CHWs and underpinnings of CHW’s motivation. The abstract section does not clearly highlight the relevant findings of the study.

I believe that a careful revision and consultations within the study team would definitely solve the current issues with the manuscript. The following comments could be addressed during the revision;

Major Revisions
Abstract
1. The manuscript explores the sources of motivation of CHWs and not their level of motivation. Hence, the study rationale should point out the current limited evidence on the factors affecting their motivation rather than that on their low level of motivation.
2. The study seems to have used a conceptual framework to explore the sources of CHWs' motivation. Hence, it would be relevant to mention this in the methods section of the abstract for the reader to better understand this approach from the beginning.

3. The conclusion mentions that CHWs are motivated by their family support, despite having insufficient motivation from other sources. But the ‘results section of the abstract’ did not say it explicitly? It would be good to add a sentence in this regard to link both the sections sequentially.

4. The results section of the abstract needs to clearly synthesize all the relevant findings of the study. It would be relevant to mention the following;
   a. by being volunteers, what are the compromises made by CHWs and their households (e.g. devoting time, non-remuneration through CHW activities, livelihood compulsions etc.)? In other words, by stressing on this piece of information only, the study objective can be full-fledged for policy relevance.
   b. though unpaid in terms of direct remuneration by the programs, they are otherwise remunerated financially by the community members.

Objective of the study

1. It is not clearly written, what was the specific objective of the study? It is essential for the reader to understand the specific objective of the study in the abstract section and in the main body of the manuscript.

2. Just knowing the sources of motivation of CHWs will not help really, without clearly exploring and linking the sources of motivation with their method of appointment, source of incentive, incentive structure etc.

3. The manuscript gives only limited information on the background characteristics of CHWs, appointment history, who retains them etc. Without really understanding who were the CHWs, how would it make sense to explore their sources of motivation?

Methods

1. The major unclear part of the manuscript to the reader is how this study was linked to or nested within the stated program evaluation of MCH program in Morogoro? The respondent recruitment is unclear. If the CHWs were already part of the program, then their designation would have been already defined. Why did the study select 20 individuals identified as CHWs by the community leader? In this regard, it would be relevant to mention the following;
   a. How many CHWs were there in the community?
   b. How did you arrive at number 20?
   c. Which CHWs did you choose? Were they only part of MCH program? The description of activities shows that they were also undertaking non-MCH activities. It is not clear who were the CHWs included in the study? What was their role in the MCH program?
   d. At what stage of the program, this study was conducted?
   e. Did you intend to use the study findings to further improve the program?
2. Was there any specific reason to select CHWs based on their residence from a health center (i.e. 3 KM)? The findings did not mention specifically on the differences in the responses of CHWs, according to their location.

3. The description of data collection tool and analysis is adequately clear and could include the following;
   a. Did you do a quality control of data coding? In the manuscript it shows only one RA conducted the coding. Would it not have biased the coding process without an independent verification?
   b. What were the qualifications of the RAs?

Results

1. A deeper description of the background details of the CHWs is relevant
   a. Who are these CHWs?
   b. Who had appointed them? OR Are they just volunteers?
   c. Appointment history of CHWs?
   d. Who pays them stipend?

2. As per the results, CHWs gave a mixed response on if supervision motivates them. So, it will not be appropriate to conclude that supervision is a motivating factor (unless the majority of them viewed supervision as a positive factor). However, the description of results does not support that supervision was positively posed by majority of the CHWs. This important revelation needs to be reflected in the abstract as well.

Minor Essential Revisions

Background

The literature base reviewed to define the conceptual framework of the study is relevant. However, it would be relevant to mention the latest cut-off year to include the literature in the similar developing country settings and ensure that all relevant articles are included.

Results

It is surprising that the average time took for the interview was 71 minutes, yet the described findings are limited?

Discussion

This section seems to be alright as it tried to corroborate a few study findings with the relevant literature, confining to the conceptual framework of the study (thought the number of literature cited is limited). It would be relevant to trace the literature on a few other aspects (other than financial incentive) pointed by CHWs as something which affected them negatively.

Tables

1. It is surprising that the themes considered in the conceptual framework is very specific and the study findings found out exactly the same themes to be effective
in the settings. Did you have other themes considered for testing and later on omitted them, as they were not relevant in the study settings?

2. Or else it would be relevant to mention if the conceptual framework was borne out of the study findings or vice versa?

3. It would be relevant to double check and ensure that Alam et.al. mentioned that CHWs interpret supervision as a sign of poor performance. Most of the literature say that CHWs demand for supportive supervision etc.

Limitations

It is essential to add a few inevitable limitations of a typical qualitative study of this type. What is the scope of the generalizibility of this study to other similar settings in Tanzania? Was there any scope of subjectivity affecting CHW’s responses?

Conclusion

It seems to be a little vague and not able to get the synthesis of study findings.

Language

The language used is well readable and most of the sentences are well structured. Some words such as numerous to be avoided and replaced with more scientific words. It would be advisable to mention the number than describing as ‘numerous number of CHWs’.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

None