Author’s response to reviews

Title: Payday, ponchos, and promotions: a qualitative analysis of perspectives from non-governmental organization program managers on community health worker motivation and incentives

Authors:

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

We want to thank you for your consideration for publication in the Human Health Resources journal. The received comments were very interesting and thoughtful.

Below you will find a detailed response to all comments brought on by reviewers. We trust that these will meet the high standards of your journal.

Please note that both Dr B-Lajoie and Dr Hulme want to be acknowledged as co-first authors.

The revised file is as well attached.

Kind regards,

Marie-Renée B-Lajoie, MDC, MPH
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Reviewer 1

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The abstract is unclear.
   a. The reader doesn’t know who are the 17 program managers (at which level, in which countries etc.)? This is only clear from the text of the main document.
      i. Abstract, section methods. More details has been provided in the abstract in regards to program managers
   b. The sentence “Results illustrate the unique opportunity for governments to both lead the development their national CHW programs and provide clear guidance to partnering NGOs” is not clear and not telling the reader a lot.
      i. Abstract, section results. This sentence has been further contextualize with the importance of six key influencers and the opportunity it creates from governments.
   c. The sentence “program managers are increasingly interested in developing career paths and innovative financing schemes…” raises the question if this is a statement or if this is a finding from this particular study.
      i. Abstract, section results. This is a finding from our study.
   d. It also leaves questions open: what are these innovative schemes?
      i. Abstract, section results. A short list of innovative schemes examples has now been provided.
   e. In summary, the abstract is unclear for readers that haven’t read the whole document and is currently not really convincing in why this research is adding on what was already known and what it can contribute to improving CHW programs.
      i. Additions have been made to clarify findings and reinforce the contributions of our study.

2. Introduction. “After decades of diverting CHW cadres as agents of horizontal programs, there is renewed interest in core principles of Alma Ata, and strengthening health systems as a whole”. This is, in my view, incorrect. If you replace the work “horizontal” to “vertical”, the statement is correct according to me. The same is there in the first paragraph of the background.
   i. Introduction, second paragraph, 1st sentence. This was a mistake our part, indeed, the sentence should read “vertical”. It has been corrected. As per comment #10, the background and introduction have been integrated together so the second sentence is also addressed now.

3. Introduction. Health program managers “who directly oversee”: this is vague. Are they in direct contact with CHWs and how? Please explain. This comes back in the background, last paragraph.
   i. Introduction, last paragraph, 1st sentence. Considering the context of the introduction and the repeated requests for information on our informants, more details on health program managers can now be found in the result section.

4. Introduction. The study is about CHW motivation schemes. Is it not about incentives schemes leading to (de)motivation?
i. Introduction, last paragraph. The sentence has been corrected to clarify the relationship between incentives and motivation. Please note that elements other than incentives contribute as well to motivation, which is briefly described in the introduction.

5. Background. I miss a definition of motivation, an explanation why this is important and how motivation in related to CHW performance and CHW (program) effectiveness.
   i. Introduction, paragraph 3. A clearer relationship has been drawn between motivation and its importance.

6. Background. Last sentence of paragraph 2 is not clear (on gaps in research).
   i. Introduction, paragraph 4, last sentence. This sentence has been reworded to explain that those gaps were highlighted in the Bhattacharya review.

7. Background. End of 4th paragraph: the example of Massachusetts doesn’t seem to relate with what is said above. Example of what?
   i. Introduction, paragraph 6, last sentence. This example exemplified the recognition of CHWs as integral parts of the healthcare workforce. The sentence has been reworded to reflect that.

8. Background. NGO code of conduct: not clear. Of which country? General? The reference doesn’t make it clear. The last sentence of this paragraph is not clear.
   i. Introduction, paragraph 8. More details have been provided on the NGO health system code of conduct. The last sentence in the introduction, paragraph 7 has been reworded.

9. Background.
   a. Start of 6th paragraph: these policy shifts: what are you referring to?
      i. Introduction, paragraph 8, 1st sentence. This has been clarified to “policy recommendations” and explicitly refers to the previous paragraph.
   b. This is not clear. In this paragraph you say “gendered” but there is no explanation. Is this about the remuneration of female CHWs against male CHWs?
      i. Introduction, paragraph 8, 3rd sentence. Gendered has been better defined.
   c. Last sentence “sense of community”: not clear.
      i. Introduction, paragraph 8, last sentence. This sentence has been revised.

10. Introduction and background: I advise to integrate them. There are duplications and part of it can go to the discussion section.
    i. The introduction now reflects the combination of the previous introduction and background.

11. Methods. Bhattacharyya’s review formed the theoretical framework for the questionnaire. Why don’t you present (some details) of this framework? Can you present the major themes you refer to? Moreover there are no references in methods section. There is little information on the tool used. A questionnaire seems not to fit with qualitative nature of the research.
    i. Our references are now included
ii. Questionnaire is the wrong term – we used a semi-structured interview guide. The methods now reflect this. The final tool used will now be added to clarify the link to the Bhattacharya review.

12. Results. Last part of paragraph 2: “incentivize performance” please explain. Are you referring to performance-based incentives?
   i. Results, National CHW policy context, paragraph 2, last sentence. This sentence has been clarified. It refers to ‘top ups’ added onto salaries in an effort to obtain better motivation and performance.

13. Results.
   a. Under innovative financing schemes: please explain in the first paragraph what the innovation entails. The order is unclear for the reader.
      i. Results, Innovative Financing Schemes, paragraph 1. More details has been provided to define innovation and provide examples.
   b. The box in the additional file is not clear to the point.
      i. The box has been shortened and is now more to the point.

14. Results. Under “it takes more than money”.
   a. Second sentence: you refer to performance, satisfaction and retention. Where is motivation? And again, how do these issues relate with each other?
      i. Results, “It takes more than money”, paragraph 1. This sentence has been reworded to better highlight the relationship. Our research focused on motivation and not performance, satisfaction or retention. However, our informants have expressed it occasionally in those terms.
   b. Third paragraph in this section: consistency was a challenge. Do you mean inconsistency?
      i. Results, “It takes more than money”, paragraph 3. Consistency was changed to inconsistency.

15. Results. There is no reference to incentives (other than recognition) coming from the communities. Did you come across examples of other community incentives? As the paper is written from a health systems perspective, what can the health system do to also stimulate these community incentives?
   i. This is an excellent question. Our informants didn’t delve into this in any detail, offering their perspective as managers, and we didn’t interview community members of CHWs themselves. It was less relevant to our research question stemming from how the shifting policy recommendations on CHWs remuneration and incentive strategies is affecting program management strategies and, as such, we unfortunately didn’t ask about it explicitly.

16. Discussion.
   a. Six key influencers: it was not clear to me where they are coming from. The same for the statement in the last sentence of paragraph 1: it is not clear where in the result this has been discussed.
      i. Discussion, paragraph 1. The six key influencers have been made more
explicit now in the result section (see National CHW policy context). We have also added a box (Box 2) with the qualitative findings from our informants relating to those 6 different influencers. For the last sentence of the paragraph, please refer to the results section on non-material incentives

b. The dynamic online forums: is this what program managers wanted or is it already there? This is not clear from the text.
   i. Discussion, paragraph 2, 5th sentence. This is something that was expressed by program managers as there is a reluctance currently to share this type of information between managers.

c. Last statement of paragraph 3: this paradox described in this study, I didn’t find it back in the results section. It is not clear. Gender has been hardly discussed.
   i. Discussion, paragraph 3. This is one of the findings of the study and one that not explicitly reported elsewhere. More details on those elements can be found in the 2nd paragraph of “Pay for work as unsustainable” and 2nd paragraph of “It takes more than money”

d. In paragraph 4: the opinion leader: who was this? One of the respondents?
   i. Discussion, paragraph 4. This sentence has been specified. It is not one of the respondent but a leader in the CHW community that advocates for remuneration beyond eight hours a week of work.

e. The last sentence of this paragraph is unclear.
   i. Discussion, paragraph 4, last sentence. This sentence has been reworded to be clearer.

f. Paragraph 5: potentially gendered bias: not clear what you mean here.
   i. Discussion, paragraph 5, 2nd sentence. This sentence has been reworded to better draw the meaning of the example.

17. Conclusion: call for operations research couldn’t be found back in other sections of the paper.
   i. This has been highlighted within the results section.

**Minor Essential Revisions**

18. Background. Start of 4th paragraph: for consistency, you would have to mention the program names in Ethiopia and Malawi as well.
   i. This has been corrected.

19. You use “Inf 4” etc. You need to provide an explanation somewhere on what this means.
   i. This refers to “Informant”. To make it easier for the readers, all “Inf” have been changed to “Informant”

20. Background. Quote of 2008 recommendations: the word “other” before non-financial incentives needs to be deleted I think, as the examples before are financial incentives.
   i. Introduction, paragraph 7: This is a citation and written as is.

21. The references are not well typed. For example: 1, 6, 7, 14, 15, 22, 29, 30, 31
   i. This has been addressed.
22. Results. Under monetary incentives, the quote in the 2nd paragraph of Inf 15: delete “motive”
   i. This has been removed.

   i. This has been corrected.

Reviewer 2

Major Compulsory Revisions
1. Methods, paragraph 2: need to clarify that the 17 interviews conducted represented how many different NGOs and countries? Further details on the sample selection would also be helpful, e.g. how comparable are the programs (and operational contexts) that each interviewee manages? (e.g. in terms of # of CHWs, population served, type of employment including # of hours, scope and type of health services included in the program, degree of collaboration with public sector, etc.)
   i. More information has been provided in the results section as these pertain to details of the final group sampled. We didn’t collect demographic details on the actual programs they were overseeing, mostly because our study objectives were to explore institutional culture and influence of international policy, as well as personal perceptions of program managers, who had often overseen multiple programs at different levels.

2. Results: at least some (and ideally all) sections of the resultant qualitative data from the interviews should be presented in a table format, to illustrate at the minimum which questions were addressed by the most interviews and reveal areas of emergent consensus
   i. In an attempt to not overburden the paper, a box including the main themes around the six main influencers, which underpin the different sections of the paper, has now been added (Box 2).

Minor Essential Revisions
The author can be trusted to make these. For example, missing labels on figures, the wrong use of a term, spelling mistakes.
2. Title: should be either “… community health workers’ motivation” or “…community health worker motivation”
   i. This has been corrected.

3. Abstract: “policing bodies”? maybe should be “policy bodies”
   i. This has been corrected.

4. Introduction, paragraph 1: “their role rallies” – incorrect verb ; “core principals of Alma Ata – should be “principles”
   i. This has been corrected.

5. Background, paragraph 2: This is an editorial comment, but I do not consider “ID badges and T-shirts” to be “small incentives”; rather then are equipment needed in
order to carry out the job.
  i. We understand your concerns and in fact, it highlights some of the
    controversies around the topic. We tried to maintain the same language as
    the program managers for consistency and the majority of them consider
    those incentives.

6. Methods, paragraph 1: “generate in” should be “generate”
  i. This has been corrected.

7. Results, “Pay for work as a right: typo, “hear’ts” should be “hearts””
  i. This has been corrected.

Reviewer 3

1. The specific contribution of this paper needs to be more clearly articulated. The authors
    say that no study has been done with this particular group of stakeholders on this
    particular set of questions. There are, however, studies that include CHW programme
    managers, and many studies of CHW motivations and incentives. Can the authors be more
    explicit about what they are adding to the debates around incentives and motivation that
    have been playing out for a number of years?
    i. Introduction, paragraph 9. We put more emphasis on the reasons behind
        our research and its proposed contributions.

2. The second paragraph in the background section needs some further context. Dan Pink is
    described as an author. Is he also a researcher with a particular expertise? How do his
    ideas intersect with those of Bhattacharya et al? And what is the context for the rest of the
    paragraph? Are all of the references to events and perceptions in that paragraph made
    with respect to the material in the Bhattacharya study?
    i. Introduction, paragraph 4. This paragraph has been both relocated and
        reworded to clarify the details of the Bhattacharya study. Dan Pink, as
        clarified in the same paragraph, is a social scientist with a unique
        perspective on motivation, which summarizes well the way
        motivation is
        now seen and approached in general.

3. The example of CHWs in Massachusetts on page 3 is confusing/not sufficiently
    described.
    i. This has been corrected.

4. Page 4: reference is made to ‘the first consideration’ and ‘the first direct mention’. ‘First’
    with respect to what?
    i. This has been corrected.

5. The final section of the findings (“What Would Be Helpful…?”) is only two sentences
    long and feels like an unintegrated after-thought. It needs to be fleshed out or integrated
    elsewhere.
    i. This has been reworded and relocated to the National CHW policy context,
        the last paragraph.
6. The beginning of the discussion introduces ‘six key influencers’ that aren’t part of the original findings. I am not a stickler for the strict separation of findings and discussion but it does seem a bit jarring to introduce six key new ideas that aren’t really named as such in the findings.
   i. These influencers are now more detailed in results.

7. In the second paragraph of the findings, the authors state that CHW programme manager requests for MoH guidance represents a ‘remarkable opportunity’ to recognize CHWs as a major force. This seems to over-state the case rather significantly. Surely programme managers’ desire for more guidance does not represent a lever or dramatic shift in thinking that would enable the tide to be turned with respect to CHW recognition.
   i. The need for more guidance may not been a dramatic shift but their desire to rely on national policy and to abide to national guidelines is certainly a strong theme that has emerged from our study and is not as documented elsewhere. This statement refers to the opportunity it presents to government to have more consistency between different NGO partners and towards an increasing workforce.

8. Replace ‘fluctuant’ with ‘fluctuating”? (page 11)
   i. This has been corrected.

9. page 3: I don’t think altruistic and financial motivations ‘seamlessly coexist’ for most CHWs. They co-exist, but rarely seamlessly.
   i. Seamlessly has been removed to clarify the meaning of the sentence.