Author’s response to reviews

Title: National guidance and district level practices in the supervision of community health workers in South Africa: a qualitative study

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Author’s response to reviews:

Reviewer #1

Page 2, line 56: replace "definition" with "definitions"
- corrected on Page 2, line 34

Page 3, line 48: add "level" after "national"
- corrected on Page 3, line 32

Page 11, line 22: after "(40)" add a full stop.
- corrected on Page 11, line 19

Page 12, line 34: replace "dedicate" with "dedicated"
- corrected on Page 12, line 38

In addition, please check and correct the punctuation throughout the reference section, for example, reference 35 "…. Health.; 2010." Semicolon after the full stop?
- all references checked and corrected.

Reviewer #2

Background

The objective written in the last paragraph of the Background should state that the study included two districts from one province in South Africa, as stated in the abstract.
- corrected as follows: Page 4, line 2-6: added “The study was based in two districts of the North West Province…”

It is not clear in the Background (nor in the methods section) if the policies and guidelines reviewed are national documents or if these are developed/adapted at the province or district levels.

- corrected as follows: Page 3, line 32: “National” ; Page 3, line 35: “the national”; Page 4, line 10: “To describe the policy on WBOT supervision, all NDoH guidelines, policy and training documents related to the WBOTs and available in the public domain since the inception of the WBOT programme were sourced”

Methods

In the abstract is mentioned that the North West Province was selected because this was an early adopter of the WBOT strategy. This should also be mentioned in the methods section. It could also be interesting to include the dates when the WBOT strategy implementation started at the different provinces and, specifically, within the selected districts.

- corrected as follows: Page 1, line 13-14: added “in the North West Province, an early adopter of the WBOT strategy”; Page 4, line 2-6: added “The study was based in two districts of the North West Province, and an early adopter of the programme. The Province started implementation immediately after the NDoH announced the programme in 2011, with pilot teams in all 19 sub-districts across the province by 2012. By December 2015, 72.6% of the 382 wards in the province reported functional teams, compared to an average of 36.4% for the country as a whole (39).”

It is not clear to me if the document analysis was based on a predefined extraction grid (based on a framework, for example; although it is mentioned some literature in the background section - ref. 27 and 29 it is not clear that this is followed in the analysis) or if the themes and sub-themes emerged from the analysis. Clarifying this would support the reader in understanding the findings.

- corrected as follows: Page 5, lines 2-5: “The text was organised along the three domains of supportive supervision (management, development, support) that emerged from the literature. Within each of the three domains, themes and sub-themes, and the specific elements were inductively coded based on the material in the documents.”
Also, it is unclear if the document review (data extraction and analysis) was conducted by more than one researcher, as a measure to limit bias and increase accuracy. If so, I suggest adding this information in the methods section.

- corrected as follows: Page 5, lines 6-7: “Both authors agreed on the framework for the analysis and read the documents. The first author (TA) did the coding, which was then discussed and validated with the second author (HS).”

Discussion

Some questions that could be interesting to explore in the discussion: Do the authors expect this to be the case of other provinces, i.e., the same findings across South Africa? If policies and guidelines are developed or adjusted at the provincial and district level, could major differences be expected in the supervision process?

- corrected as follows: Page 12, lines 24-30: “The national frameworks reviewed substantively shaped how the North West Province approached the supervision of WBOTs and the findings in this province are likely to be mirrored in other provinces. Although provinces are required to develop implementations plans where adaptations may be introduced within the broad framework, in practice, at the time of this research the national policy documents were being implemented without much provincial and local adaptations. Nonetheless, the day to day experiences of supervision largely depend on the nature of local leadership and context from districts to facilities, and in turn, this is likely to result in variations across provinces and districts.“

References

The citations and reference list require review for consistency and accuracy.

- all references checked and corrected.