



Research to identify factors in supervision that influence motivation and performance among community health workers in Mozambique



BACKGROUND

Many countries around the world have seen the value of community health worker (CHW) programmes in expanding equitable access to health services. It is vital to understand how CHW programmes can best be implemented if the goal of universal health coverage is to be attained. In Mozambique, CHWs, known as Agentes Polivalentes Elementares (APEs), have played a key role in the delivery of health services in rural communities for more than 30 years. Challenges in monitoring and supervising APEs led to the suspension of the programme, with a revitalised APE programme rolled out in 2010. Protocols and policy are in place for every tier of supervision, from the province, district and health facility to APE levels. A key tool used to supervise APEs is the checklist which enables health facility supervisors to verify the availability of drugs, as well as monthly reports.

A wealth of evidence shows that supervision is linked to motivation and the performance of health care workers. Motivation is a key factor determining performance. Various studies have shown that supervision can improve CHWs' motivation and performance. Evidence on supervising CHWs is, however, limited, particularly data capturing the perceptions of CHWs and their supervisors: this would help clarify which elements of supervision may lead to CHWs doing their jobs better. Few studies exist on APEs - who are volunteers - notably, how supervision affects their motivation. The international consortium, REACHOUT, therefore undertook a qualitative study to identify which factors relating to supervision shape APEs' motivation and, ultimately, performance. Twenty-nine in-depth interviews were conducted of carefully selected participants, including APEs, health facility supervisors, district supervisors and community leaders from two districts. Transcripts were translated, checked and analysed to identify key themes.



KEY FINDINGS

"I had my last supervision in June last year and so far not yet had any other visit, that demotivates me because it seems that I was forgotten."

APE, female, 23 years old

- Supervisors served as an important link between the APE programme and the health system, and between the programme and communities. APEs valued supervisors' help and mentoring; this support and their presence enhanced the credibility of the APE programme and the APEs themselves in the community. Supervisors monitored the APE programme through monthly reports but failed to feed back to APEs on their performance or the programme in general. When subsidies were not paid to APEs, supervisors, as the face of the health system, were placed in an uncomfortable position: they found this demotivating.
- Despite clear APE guidelines and timetables, in practice, supervision was erratic and infrequent. The timing of supervision was influenced by challenges such as lack of resources, transport and fuel, as well as supervisors' heavy workload due to their roles as managers and their duties at the health facility. Sporadic supervision demotivated APEs and affected the programme.
- The nature of supervision provided was an important factor shaping APEs' motivation. Many supervisors focused merely on completing the checklist and missed other APE duties such as health promotion meetings. The management style was critical rather than constructive.
- The training supervisors had received for the role was limited. What little training there was focused on completing checklists. Supervisors lacked positive role models: their supervision by district level managers was similarly critical. As a result, many supervisors felt unsupported.
- In remote, rural areas, APEs were also supported by the community itself. Community leaders fulfilled a monitoring role, providing some oversight of the APEs' work. On the whole, the community's engagement was positive.

LIMITATIONS

The number of supervisors in the study was small. A larger sample, with a more equal gender balance and targeted questioning, is necessary for a gender analysis which could explore links between APE gender, empowerment and assertiveness. APEs and community leaders were not chosen for interview randomly, rather they were selected with the supervisors' assistance. APEs were identified based on a number of criteria, including diversity of age, experience and gender.

CONCLUSIONS

This REACHOUT study found that APEs welcomed supervisors' help and mentoring, however, in practice, supervision was not only erratic and infrequent but also critical: factors which affected their motivation. Supervisors lacked training in management and felt unsupported. Both APEs and their supervisors were in need of supportive supervision, where team members are listened to, their achievements are recognised and problems are solved as a team, rather than an approach based on fault-finding and checklists. The study identifies regular supportive supervision as a key factor in APEs' motivation, with the potential to improve their performance. A recent review found that enhancing the quality of CHW supervision had a greater impact than increasing its frequency.

The role of the community - particularly in areas far from health facilities - in monitoring and motivating APEs is important but not enough: solutions must be linked to formal supervision by the health system. This study underlines the need for improved supervision to boost APEs' motivation and ultimately performance. In poor communities, solutions must be sustainable. The REACHOUT team recommends a two-fold strategy: a group approach to APE supervision which aims to empower and develop them, in conjunction with support and training of supervisors to build their people management skills. Finally, supervisors must feed back to APEs so that they can harness learning opportunities and both can contribute to the success of the CHW programme.

READ THE FULL PAPER

Ndima S.D., Sidat M., Give C., Ormel H., Kok M.C. and Taegtmeier M. (2015) **Supervision of community health workers in Mozambique: a qualitative study of factors influencing motivation and programme implementation.** Human Resources for Health 2015, 13:63

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