

Peer Review Report

Review Report on Importance of Community Health Workers for Maternal Health Care Management

Review, Public Health Rev

Reviewer: Giulia Sesa

Submitted on: 16 Dec 2023

Article DOI: 10.3389/phrs.2024.1606803

EVALUATION

Q 1 Please summarize the main theme of the review.

The paper focuses on the roles and responsibilities of Community Health Workers (CHWs) in assisting pregnant and lactating women. The authors perform a comparison between India, seven developed countries, namely Canada, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and the US, and seven South Asian developing countries, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Buthan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The authors compare the roles and responsibilities of CHWs across the selected countries by focusing on dimensions of "background, implementation, training, roles & responsibilities, incentives, supervision, and impact". Based on the performed comparison the authors conclude that CHW programs are not self-sustaining entities.

Q 2 Please highlight the limitations and strengths.

The authors did a good job in performing this review. The data retrieved is relevant to the public health environment. Specifically, Tables 1, 2, and 3 in the appendix are very informative. Nonetheless, I believe that the way the data is put forward and presented to the reader could be significantly improved. Specifically, the way the introduction is structured, the lack of a research aim and question in the introduction, the lack of specificity in the methodology section, and the presentation of the results need to be worked on. Specific suggestions on how to improve the piece have been added in the major and minor comments section.

Q 3 Please provide your detailed review report to the authors, structured in major and minor comments.

Title: The title should be improved as it reads too generic. I suggest expanding the title to include the methodology employed and the fact that the study comprised developed and developing countries. I would personally suggest the following:

"Identifying the roles and responsibilities of Community Health Workers for Maternal Health Care Management: A Review on the current state of affairs across developed and developing countries" or something along those lines.

Abstract (minor comment): The sentence "Developed countries have frameworks for CHWs, such as the Swasthya Shebika Program, Village Health Worker Cadret, Lady Health Worker Program, and Accredited Social Health Activist program" seems wrong to me. I believe you meant developing not developed countries.

Introduction: The introduction should be revised. More attention is needed on behalf of the authors when it comes to the completeness of sentences, English language, references, generalizations, and the order the information is presented.

Minor Comments (Introduction):

The authors start the introduction with a definition of communities and CHWs. Attention should be placed on adding a reference for the definition of CHWs

"The term "community health worker" (CHW) refers to social service and/or public health professionals who work effectively with and for the community, promoting healthy lifestyles. They might provide paid or unpaid volunteer work for a nearby business, institution, or hospital. Similarities in race, language, culture, financial background, values, and life experiences exist between CHWs and the community individuals they serve."

Later the authors introduce the concept of maternal health and state that "A shocking 287,000 women died during and after pregnancy and delivery in 2020". The authors should pay attention to stating whether such data is global, European, etc., or refers to a specific country. Likewise, when the authors talk about the National Health Mission and the National Urban Health Mission they should specify at the start of the paragraph the country they are referring to (I assume India from what I read later in the text). In the same paragraph there is an incomplete sentence:

"The three main elements of the program are Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases, Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A), and ... "

Also, it is not clear to which program this line is referring to. Is it to the NHM to the NUHM or both?

The authors should also pay more attention to the abbreviations present in the text. For instance, in the third paragraph, the following is written " MMR (maternal mortality ratio)". In the same paragraph, I see "Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)". The authors should be consistent. I suggest that the text is revised (not only the introduction) and that the abbreviations are fixed to have first the sentence and then the abbreviation. For example "MMR (maternal mortality ratio)" should be written as follows Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR). Another important element concerning abbreviations is that not all are mentioned in the text or tables for instance it is not explained what LHWs or SSs refer to. Please write these fully before abbreviating.

Major Comments (Introduction)

The authors should end the introduction with a research aim and question. I also believe that the paragraph ending the introduction is problematic, as the significance claimed by the authors is too broad. From reading and reflecting upon your review, I do indeed agree that the study is significant for " the larger community, government, policymakers, health planners, national program, researchers, program managers, and the public health system of India". However, I find it problematic to claim that the study will enable "in exploring the problems faced by health workers and beneficiaries in implementing maternal healthcare schemes or programs generated by the government. This also enables me in knowing nations' perspectives regarding maternal health care" as I would conceive a different kind of study methodology to explore such issues. Instead of these phrases, I would add one that talks about how reviewing the responsibilities and functions of CHWs across different countries might help public health professionals and policymakers see how CHWs operate in other nations, learning from these and picking up successful practices and modifying them to fit the local environment.

Also, the sentence "Understanding more about the precise role, responsibilities, and contributions of these CHWs in enhancing the health status of the community. This will also be helpful to the larger community, government, policymakers, health planners, national programs, researchers, program managers, and the public health system of India" needs to be merged as the first sentence is grammatically incomplete. You could merge them as follows:

"Understanding more about the precise role, responsibilities, and contributions of CHWs in enhancing maternal status will also be helpful to the larger community, government, policymakers, health planners, national program, researchers, program managers, and the public health system of India".

Methodology: The methodology section is weak and needs major revisions.

Minor Comments (Methodology): In the first paragraph you mention your study has the objective of understanding nations' perspectives on maternal health care. Again, I believe this claim is not in line with the

objective and the results of your study and would conceive a broader study with a different methodology to investigate such a case. Remove such part of the sentence and merge with the next one.

Major Comments (Methodology): I do understand that this piece is not a systematic review. However, I would expect more description of how the review was conducted on the databases mentioned by the authors. Specifically, I would like to see the search string used along with the number of articles retrieved from the search. Inclusion and exclusion criteria should also be mentioned. How many articles were screened by the authors (full-text) and how many were eventually included in the study? Given the reference list, I would also expect a sentence mentioning that some of the documents employed by the authors were found on the relevant Ministry of Health or Governmental pages of the selected countries. Please also mention the period the search was performed (i.e., May – July 2023). Ultimately, I would expect to see a reflection as to why the countries in Tables 1,2, and 3 were included in the study (beyond the reason that the authors wanted to have developed and developing countries). For instance, why did you select Canada, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and the US for the developed countries, and for instance, you did not include Switzerland or Spain? Was the selection based on the availability of articles? Were there some criteria based on geography or the structure of the health systems?

Also, I see from the tables that the data for each country is analyzed based on the dimensions of background, implementation, training, roles & responsibilities, incentives, supervision, and impact. I would like to see in the methodology a definition of what the authors mean with such a heading as sometimes this is confusing when looking at the table (i.e., with "implementation" are you referring to where the CHWs work within the healthcare systems, as described for Italy and Canada, or on what CHWs focus on, like what you mentioned under US and Japan). This will also improve the quality of the Tables in the article. Please also read the feedback I gave for results & discussions as it might be useful to change the headings provided in the table and categorize information differently.

Results & Discussions: The section is hard to read and follow if one does not have the table in front. Please improve based on the suggestions below.

Minor Comments (Results & Discussions): From what I see in the first part of the results section there is a repetition of the fact that Iran has an MMR comparable to developed countries (this is already addressed in the methodology). You should consider whether you want to place this information in the methodology or the results (but not in both). I also do not believe the information on China is fundamental, at least in the results section, given that China is not a country included in the study. Last, I would expect a reflection on Figures 1A and 1B (beyond Iran).

Major Comments (Results & Discussions): The first section of your results should explain how your results are structured. For instance, first, the roles and responsibilities of CHWs in developed countries are discussed addressing their implementation in the community, second their training, third their salary, and last societal impact. What is essential is that the order the information is discussed is the same in both paragraphs discussing the roles and responsibilities of CHWs in developed and in developing countries. Also, I believe that if you use the headings implementation, training, salary, and societal impact in the results it is confusing to me why Tables 1 and 2 have different headings (namely, background, implementation, roles & responsibilities, incentives, supervision, and impact). Please be consistent. If the information in the results is grouped under the headings implementation, training, salary, and impact I expect to see such headings in the table (restructure the table and group / separate the information accordingly if necessary or change the headings/terms used in the results).

When it comes to the section "Roles and responsibilities of CHWs" I would subdivide this section and include the headings "roles and responsibilities of CHWs in developed countries and "roles and responsibilities of CHWs in developing countries" to improve readability.

Also, make sure to reference to which country the information presented is about (for instance, the Lady Health Worker program where does that take place? Or again the sentence "Compensation aligns with government

salary structures, and they receive accommodation, maintenance, and allowances" to which developing country does that refer?). Most importantly, I do understand that you want to cluster information but be careful with generalizations (for instance, the sentence "CHW are implemented by NHS (National Health Services) to reduce complications associated with pregnant and lactating women" does not seem right to me. I would rather write health services rather than national health services as not all countries included in your list (the US for example) have a national / Beveridge-style healthcare system (these are typically the UK and IT that have an NHS).

Conclusions: The conclusions read well. However, some adjustments are necessary especially as some parts of the conclusions do not follow naturally from the results. All the information provided in the conclusions should be related to your study aim and derived from the results.

Major comments (Conclusions): The first sentences in the conclusions should provide an answer to your research aim/objective, which in the case of this study is the identification of the roles and responsibilities of CHWs that assist pregnant and lactating women in developed and developing countries. I expect to see one or two sentences answering this question and a reflection on whether the authors detected any differences across developing and developed countries and what countries could learn from each other or improve. While the conclusion made by the authors that the "evidence presented here indicates conclusively that CHW programs are not self-sustaining entities" seems relevant it does not provide a clear answer to the research question and could be moved later in the text.

Please also be extremely careful with generalizations. The sentence "In developed countries, health services are provided with free comprehensive coverage to the entire population irrespective of socioeconomic status to ensure equity in the system" is false. Services are not always offered for free. This depends on how the healthcare system is arranged as well as which services you are talking about (for instance, England and Italy have national healthcare systems, funded by taxes, in which residents receive most care free of charge. Contrastingly, the US health system is a mix of public and private, non-profit and for-profit providers and insurers. In the US there is no such thing as universal health insurance coverage. Healthcare is not free of charge and a portion of the population is uninsured). The same goes for this sentence "In developed countries CHW are implemented by National Health Service whereas in developed counties by Ministry of Health".

Last, your conclusions end with the barriers that discourage women from seeking or receiving care during pregnancy and childbirth. Such data does not emerge from your research and goes beyond discussions on CHWs and their roles and responsibilities. I would substitute such a paragraph with a section on what your results practically mean for the academic community (is there some area where further studies should be performed?) as well as a reflection on the implications of the results at the level of public health practices/policies.

PLEASE COMMENT

Q 4 Does the reference list cover the relevant literature adequately and in an unbiased manner?

I believe the reference list is comprehensive, including a broad range of sources (i.e., policy briefs, research articles, press releases, and governmental websites). The authors could improve the reference list by adding a reference for Italy and Afghanistan (the relevant references for such countries are not mentioned in the tables either).

Some minor comments:

Reference 4: Please include the name of the journal, volume, and page numbers. This should be the Iranian Journal of Nursing and Midwifery Research (IJNMR) 2009, 14(3): 117-122 but please check.

Reference 9: The URL link does not seem right. Please check it.

Reference 11: Check the URL. The link does not work.

Reference 19: The link does not work and the title of the reference does not seem complete. Please check this reference.

Reference 27: Reference 27 seems to include two separate references (the piece How Community Health Workers can reinvent health care delivery in the US and the Rural Health Information Hub website). Please check this reference - I think I new reference should be made after the DOI. The websites for this reference should be <https://www.healthaffairs.org/content/forefront/community-health-workers-can-reinvent-health-care-delivery-us> for the piece How Community Health Workers can reinvent health care delivery in the US and <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/states/california> for the rural health information hub website).

Reference 28: The title of the piece is written twice.

Reference 33: The link does not work.

Reference 35: Sun Diego. I guess you mean San Diego.

Reference 37: The link does not work.

Reference 38: The link does not work.

Reference 41: The link does not work.

Q 5 Does this manuscript refer only to published data? (unpublished data is not allowed for Reviews)

Yes.

Q 6 Does the manuscript cover the issue in an objective and analytical manner

Yes.

Q 7 Was a review on the issue published in the past 12 months?

No.

Q 8 Does the review have international or global implications?

Yes. The review has an international relevance and potentially global implications.

Q 9 Is the title appropriate, concise, attractive?

The title should be improved as it reads too generic. I suggest expanding the title to include the methodology employed and the fact that the study comprised developed and developing countries. I would personally suggest the following:

"Identifying the roles and responsibilities of Community Health Workers for Maternal Health Care Management: A Review on the current state of affairs across developed and developing countries" or something along those lines.

Q 10 Are the keywords appropriate?

I believe that the keywords should be expanded to include developed and developing countries.

Q 11 Is the English language of sufficient quality?

The English language should be improved. As previously mentioned, all words should be fully written before their abbreviated form. This is not consistent throughout the piece. For instance, you mention "community

health worker (CHW)" and a few paragraphs below "MMR (maternal mortality ratio)". Please substitute as follows: "Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)". Also, another important element concerning abbreviations, is that not all are explained in the text or tables for instance it is not explained what LHWs or SSs refer to. Please write these fully before abbreviating. Some sentences are incomplete (see comments introduction). In the section Roles and responsibilities of CHWs, it is written "Health centers, including health centers, employ a District Health Management Team (DHMT) and NGOs to implement BPHS" please remove the repetition. In the same section (first sentence of the section) it is written "In this section, roles and responsibilities of Community health workers is discussed" the "is discussed" should be substituted with "are discussed". The same goes for the sentence "The roles and responsibilities of CHWs in India is presented in table 3 with special emphasis on Auxiliary Nurse and Midwife (ANM) ... " where the "is presented" should be substituted with "are presented".

Q 12 Is the quality of the figures and tables satisfactory?

Yes.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Q 13 Quality of generalization and summary



Q 14 Significance to the field



Q 15 Interest to a general audience



Q 16 Quality of the writing



REVISION LEVEL

Q 17 Please take a decision based on your comments:

Major revisions.