

Understanding Volunteer Community Health Worker Motivation: A longitudinal cohort study in Sierra Leone.

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In the lead up to 2015, low-resource settings are increasingly relying on community health workers (CHW) to deliver and promote primary health care services. CHWs however, are not exempt from the same underlying system factors that negatively impact the motivation, job satisfaction, and work engagement of more highly qualified, salaried health workers. A better understanding of what motivates, and what factors contribute to the sustained motivation of volunteer CHWs over time in Sierra Leone, is therefore necessary in order for present and future CHW programmes to better select, monitor, manage, and ultimately retain volunteer CHWs.

This study has three primary objectives. First, this study explores the validity and applicability of self-determination and functional theories of motivation, as well as the psychometric scales commonly used to explore them, in the Sierra Leonean context. Second, this study explores the causal relationships between motivation, job satisfaction, work engagement, and supervision of CHWs across time. Lastly, this study examines how these variables change over time and how observed changes can be used to predict changes in job satisfaction and work engagement of CHWs.

A longitudinal cohort research design was employed with a sample of 333 CHWs in Bonthe District, Sierra Leone. Data collection took place across three different time points, spanning 18-months. Using structural equation modelling (SEM) the first objective was achieved through validating, and where necessary, developing psychometric scales for the Sierra Leonean context. The combined measurement models were subsequently validated through full structural modelling. To achieve the second objective, multiple mediation conditional process analysis was employed. Lastly, repeated measures ANOVA, and where applicable latent growth modelling as well as multiple regression techniques were used to assess how changes in perceived supervision and volunteer motivation predicted changes in CHW job satisfaction and work engagement.

Findings demonstrate that none of the scales in their original format were found to adequately fit the data collected. As a result, re-specified scales are put forward for future use in the Sierra Leonean context. Whereas certain volunteer motives were found to partially mediate the relationship between supervision and job satisfaction, others were found to entirely mediate the relationship with work engagement. Changes in perceived unsupportive and supportive supervision, protective, social and values & understanding motives, all significantly predicted changes in job satisfaction, whereas changes in supportive supervision, protective and self-esteem motives significantly predicted changes in work engagement.

Volunteering as a CHW in Sierra Leone is a dynamic process; CHWs volunteer to fulfil different motives and these are susceptible to change over time as a result of individual and environmental factors. This study contributes to the existing knowledge in this area through re-specified measurement tools for use in this context and a better understanding of the factors and mechanisms through which volunteer motivation contributes to work engagement and job satisfaction of CHWs in Sierra Leone. The implications of these findings for existing CHW policy and future CHW programme implementation are discussed.