

HEALTH WORKER ENGAGEMENT STUDY: TANZANIA

Background

The concept of “engaging” employees in their work offers a new way of thinking about managing human resources. Research has shown that more engaged workers perform better and are more productive in health and other sectors. However, almost all evidence to date has come from middle or high income countries and may not be applicable to low resource contexts. The Tanzania Health Worker Engagement Study was undertaken with the support of PEPFAR under the USAID Health Care Improvement Project (HCI) and the USAID Applying Science to Strengthen and Improve Systems Project (ASSIST) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences in Tanzania. This brief summarizes the study highlights.

Study Objectives

- Study employee engagement among health workers providing HIV services in a low-resource setting
- Explore the relationship between engagement, performance and retention
- Develop and validate a tool to measure the level of engagement of facility-based health workers

Key Findings

Four key characteristics of an engaged health care worker were identified as relevant to facility level performance:

- Being a change agent
- Job satisfaction
- Accountability
- Equitable and client-centered care



Health workers in Tanzania engaged in team work. Photo by Delphina Ntangeki, URC.

Factors contributing to engagement of health workers included:

- Perceived support health workers felt they received from their immediate supervisor, in terms of encouragement, supervisory support, and inter-personal relationship;
- Perceived adequacy of competencies to perform

Key Implications of Findings for Practice

Engagement was not associated with the perceived adequacy of resources.

This finding raises the possibility that engagement of health worker is independent of the level of resources a health facility has and could thus potentially be influenced, even in the most poorly resourced settings. It also means that having greater resources in a health facility does not mean that health workers are more engaged as a result.

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Engagement was associated with performance in complex tasks that require problem solving and team work and multiple processes to work together, such as reducing loss to follow-up of HIV clients.

Engagement was not associated with performance in simpler tasks such as ordering lab tests. However, that it is associated with performance in complex tasks is particularly important in the context of efforts towards an HIV free generation—a movement which necessitates complex processes to come together across the continuum of care at multiple points.

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Study Sample

Quantitative data was collected at the individual health worker level and health facility level from 1330 staff from 183 randomly selected health facilities in 27 districts and 6 purposively selected regions in Tanzania. Qualitative data included semi-structured interviews with 50 health workers.

Methods Used

The study used mixed qualitative and quantitative methods. Study instruments were developed through literature reviews, assessment of existing tools, and focus groups with local stakeholders. Individual questionnaires completed by health workers gathered data to assess the characteristics of engagement and factors influencing engagement, retention and performance. Facility level data provided information on available human resources and HIV service delivery performance indicators and resource management (e.g., supplies and medicines). Qualitative data were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed in SPSS descriptively, comparatively, and Principal Components analysis was

Tanzania Study Results: What makes a health worker engaged? What influences engagement?

Engaged health worker characteristics

Change agent
Proactive, focused on improvements, team player, facilitate learning

Job satisfaction
Pride in work, satisfied with work, employee trust, relationships and work environment

Accountable
Answerable to responsibilities, clear understanding of job expectations, practice self-reflection

Equitable and client-centered
Quality of care does not vary by client characteristics, treat clients respectfully

Factors influencing engagement

Perceived support from immediate supervisor

Perceived adequacy of competencies to perform

used to identify and validate employee engagement constructs (characteristics) and factors influencing engagement. Mean engagement scores and factors influencing engagement across all staff in respondent health facilities were computed and analyzed against performance indicators to identify relationships between employee

engagement, other factors and performance through cluster analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify salient issues, patterns and contradictions—the analysis was based around the constructs of employee engagement and factors influencing engagement found in the quantitative analysis.

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