Assessing the effect of the Health[e]Community blended e-learning training for Community Health Workers in Suriname

Chris Blom¹ Nadine Pakker¹ Alyanne Boon¹
Ashna Hindori-Mohangoo² Manodj Hindori²

¹Health[e] Foundation, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, ²Stichting Perisur, Paramaribo, Suriname

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Suriname faces challenges with regard to maternal, child and community health, including high teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, unsafe abortions, suboptimal contraception use, and low child vaccination rates. Moreover, there is a lack of access to health information and human resources for health. Community Health Workers (CHWs) contribute to solutions to close these gaps, lower the threshold for health seeking, counter misinformation and empower community members by providing guidance, support and advice. The blended e-learning Health[e]Community training for Surinamese CHWs on maternal, child and community health targets this potential. This research study aimed to deepen the understanding of the effect of blended e-learning training on the knowledge, skills and capacity of CHWs and on community members in Suriname and the translation of these effects to public health.

Building on the impact value chain and CHW’s performance assessment tool as theoretical background, a convergent parallel mixed methods research was conducted. The quantitative method compared pre- and post-test scores on training modules and surveys among the intervention group and control group of non-intervention CHWs. The qualitative method comprised in-depth, semi-structured interviews with training intervention participants.

Results indicated significant knowledge gain for CHWs on all module topics as a result of the training, with most knowledge gain on how to care for newborns and young children and on drug abuse and addiction. The training increased CHWs capability to advice on prenatal stages, breastfeeding and nutrition for newborns; increased their confidence regarding talking about safe sex and supporting pregnant women; but did not improve their decision-making on what services or support to provide. Moreover, the training intensified the frequency and improved the quality of knowledge transfer of CHWs to community members, especially regarding safe sex and drug use and addiction.

In conclusion, the Health[e]Community training has been effective on capacitating CHWs with the needed knowledge and skills to support, inform and empower communities. It is recommended to expand currently lacking training for CHWs in Suriname through blended e-learning training on health topics as this has the potential to sustainably and inclusively impact the health of Surinamese communities.