

Are vaccination programmes delivered by lay health workers cost-effective? A systematic review

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Background

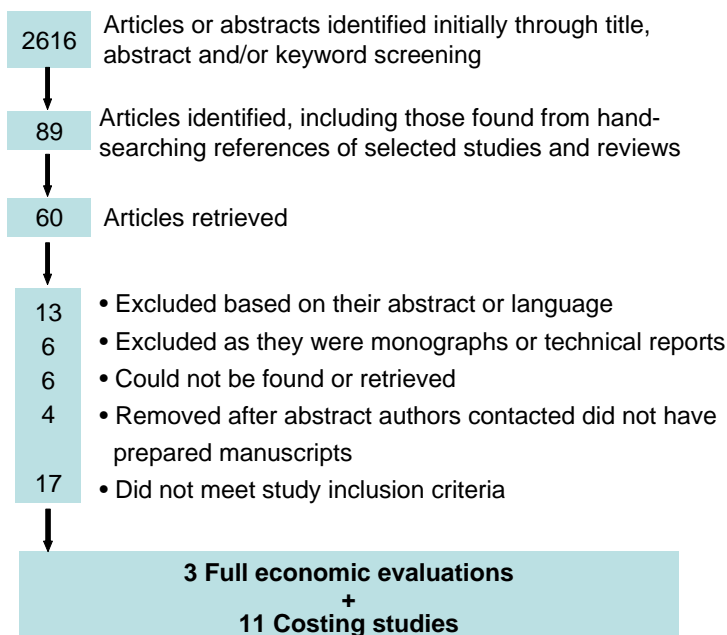
A recently updated Cochrane review concludes that lay or community health worker (LHW) programmes can result in a greater proportion of children completing their immunisation schedule. What is lacking, however, is an understanding of the cost and cost-effectiveness of these programmes.

As part of a wider study on LHW programmes (www.sintef.no/layvac), we conducted a systematic review on the cost and cost-effectiveness of immunisation programmes involving LHWs.

Methods

- We retrieved articles if the title, keywords or abstract included terms related to 'lay health workers', 'vaccination' and 'economics'.
- We searched reference lists of studies assessed for inclusion and contacted authors of studies included in the Cochrane review.
- We included studies after assessing eligibility of the full-text article.

QUORUM Flowchart



Discussion

Methodologically, the included studies were strong. However, there was insufficient data to draw conclusions regarding the cost-effectiveness of using LHWs to promote immunisation uptake.

Studies focused mainly on health-related outcomes. Affordability and sustainability issues were largely ignored. LHWs were used in a variety of ways and in a range of settings, limiting their comparability. The studies illustrated to some extent how institutional characteristics, such as governance and sources of financial support, influence sustainability.

Conclusion

Systematic reviews of economic evaluations answer useful questions about the amount of research that has been conducted and the quality of this research. While the studies that met our criteria were of good quality, there exists enormous gaps in our knowledge due to this limited evidence base.

Our review suggests that conventional economic evaluations, particularly cost-effectiveness analyses, generally focus too narrowly on health outcomes. Further studies on the costs and cost-effectiveness of vaccination programmes involving LHWs should be conducted, and these studies should adopt a broader, more holistic approach.

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