

Barriers and Challenges Faced by Accredited Social Health Activists in Delivering Healthcare Services in India: A Meta-Synthesis

INPLASY202550004

doi: 10.37766/inplasy2025.5.0004

Received: 1 May 2025

Published: 1 May 2025

Khobragade, AW; Tiwari, V; Halve, J; Goel, AK.

Corresponding author:

ASHISH KHOBRADE

drawk2008@gmail.com

Author Affiliation:

All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Raipur, India.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**Support** - None.**Review Stage at time of this submission** - Preliminary searches.**Conflicts of interest** - None declared.**INPLASY registration number:** INPLASY202550004**Amendments** - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 1 May 2025 and was last updated on 1 May 2025.**INTRODUCTION**

Review question / Objective As identified in qualitative research studies, what are the key barriers and challenges ASHA workers face in providing healthcare services?

The study's objective is to generate pooled evidence on the challenges and barriers ASHA workers face in delivering healthcare services through a systematic meta-synthesis of qualitative studies.

Rationale ASHA workers face numerous barriers and challenges that hinder their effectiveness. Issues such as inadequate incentives, lack of formal recognition, excessive workload, safety concerns, and limited community cooperation impact their motivation and efficiency. Understanding these challenges through a meta-synthesis approach will provide insights into policy interventions that can enhance their working conditions, improve service delivery, and strengthen primary healthcare.

A comprehensive meta-synthesis compiling evidence from multiple qualitative studies has not been conducted in this area till now. A meta-synthesis approach is essential for systematically analyzing and integrating findings from diverse qualitative research studies on the experiences of ASHA workers. Unlike single qualitative studies, which are limited in scope and generalizability, a meta-synthesis provides pooled evidence, offering a broader and more nuanced understanding of the barriers faced by ASHAs across different regions and contexts. This study aims to identify common patterns, policy gaps, and systemic inefficiencies, ultimately leading to evidence-based recommendations for enhancing ASHA workers' support systems, training programs, and incentive structures.

Condition being studied India's public health system heavily relies on community-based health workers, particularly Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), who are the primary link between the healthcare system and rural communities. Introduced under the National Rural

Health Mission (NRHM) in 2005, ASHAs are community health volunteers trained to deliver essential health services at the grassroots level. These workers are expected to bridge the gap in healthcare accessibility by promoting preventive, promotive, and curative health services.

METHODS

Search strategy The information for this meta-synthesis will be retrieved from peer-reviewed qualitative research studies available in the following academic databases. Conference abstracts and proceedings will not be considered.

- PubMed
- Scopus
- Google Scholar

We will conduct a comprehensive literature search using multiple databases to explore the barriers and challenges faced by Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers in delivering healthcare services.

The following search terms will be included:

- "Barriers and challenges"
- "ASHA workers"
- "Qualitative study"
- "Focus Group Discussions (FDGs)"
- "In-depth interviews"

We will use the following Boolean characters to refine search results:

- (Barriers AND Challenges) AND (ASHA* workers OR ASHA OR Accredited Social Health Activist*) AND (Qualitative study OR Focus Group Discussion* OR FGD OR In-depth interview*).

Participant or population Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs).

Intervention There will be no intervention.

Comparator There will be no comparator.

Study designs to be included We will include qualitative studies.

Eligibility criteria We will use the SPIDER framework in this meta-synthesis.

- Sample – ASHA workers providing healthcare services
- Phenomenon of Interest – Barriers and challenges faced while delivering healthcare services
- Design- Qualitative studies, including interviews, focus group discussions, and ethnographic research
- Evaluation - Perceptions, experiences, and reported challenges of ASHA workers

- Research Type- Qualitative study and Mixed methods

This meta-synthesis will include qualitative studies focusing on ASHA workers' barriers and challenges in delivering healthcare services. The inclusion criteria for the studies are as follows:

- Time Frame: Studies published between 2015 and 2025 will be considered to ensure the inclusion of recent and relevant findings.
- Language: Only studies published in English will be included to maintain consistency in interpretation and analysis.
- Publication Status: Only peer-reviewed published studies will be considered, ensuring the credibility and reliability of the data sources.
- Study Type: The included studies must employ qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, ethnographic studies, or other qualitative methodologies that explore the experiences of ASHA workers.

Information sources The information for this meta-synthesis will be retrieved from peer-reviewed qualitative research studies available in the following academic databases. Conference abstracts and proceedings will not be considered.

- PubMed
- Scopus
- Google Scholar.

Main outcome(s) Pooled evidence on systemic, social, and operational barriers affecting ASHA workers' efficiency and motivation.

Additional outcome(s) None.

Data management Two independent reviewers will systematically search relevant articles across PubMed, Google Scholar, and Scopus. Duplicate articles will be identified and removed. Articles will be screened based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and only those meeting the eligibility criteria will be included for further analysis.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis To ensure the methodological rigour of the selected studies, a quality assessment will be conducted using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist.

Strategy of data synthesis The qualitative data from the selected studies will be analyzed using QualCoder software. The analysis will follow a thematic synthesis approach to systematically identify, categorize, and interpret key themes emerging from the studies.

Subgroup analysis The thematic analysis will be done to categorize barriers faced by ASHA workers.

Sensitivity analysis The sensitivity analysis will be done by excluding studies one by one, checking methodological qualities and comparing the thematic analysis to look for core themes.

Language restriction We will consider articles published only in English language.

Country(ies) involved India.

Other relevant information None

Keywords ASHA Workers, barriers, Focused Group Discussion, In-depth Interviews, Qualitative study, Metasynthesis.

Dissemination plans The study will be published in the relevant journal.

Contributions of each author

Author 1 - ASHISH KHOBRADE - Author 1 drafted the protocol and will do data synthesis and analysis.

Email: drawk2008@gmail.com

Author 2 - Vivek Tiwari - The author 2 will search the articles, extract the information, and conduct a risk of bias assessment.

Email: vvivektiwarii@gmail.com

Author 3 - Juhi Halve - The author 2 will search the articles, extract the information, and conduct a risk of bias assessment.

Email: juhihalve@gmail.com

Author 4 - Anil Goel - The author 4 read and edited the protocol. The manuscript will be finalized by the author 4.

Email: akgoel@aiimsraipur.edu.in