INPLASY

Occupational mental health among community health workers in low- and middle-income countries: a systematic prevalence review protocol

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Review Stage at time of this submission - The review has not yet started.

Conflicts of interest - None declared.

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Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 23 March 2026 and was last updated on 23 March 2026.

INTRODUCTION

*R*eview question / Objective This study aims to identify the prevalence of occupational mental health issues among CHWs in LMICs and consists of four objectives:
1. Identify the prevalence of anxiety, burnout, depression, substance use, and traumatic stress, as well as contributing factors, among various CHW cadres in LMICs.
2. Document gaps in existing knowledge relevant to the prevalence of these mental health issues among CHWs.
3. Assess the quality of the existing evidence on the prevalence of occupational mental health issues among CHWs in LMICs.
4. Conduct meta-analysis on results if sufficient homogeneity exists.

Rationale Community health workers (CHWs) are often tasked with bringing health messaging and even primary health care services directly to communities. Despite global calls to address occupational mental health for CHWs and known associations between work requirements and occupational mental health issues among healthcare workers more generally, little is known about the occupational mental health of CHWs. This prevalence review seeks to compile existing evidence on occupational mental health for CHWs across low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Condition being studied This study will explore five mental health issues: anxiety, burnout, depression, substance abuse, and traumatic stress.

METHODS

Participant or population This review will focus on CHWs working in low- and middle-income countries only. Studies covering CHW populations aligned with the International Labour Classification of Occupations Code 3253: those who provide health education, referral and follow-up, case management, basic preventive health care, and home-visiting services to specific communities are eligible for inclusion.

Intervention There is no intervention associated with this review.

Comparator There is no comparator associated with this review.

Study designs to be included Cohort or cross-sectional studies.

Eligibility criteria Due to resource constraints, this review will be limited to studies available in English. It will focus on literature published from 1978 forward, as this aligns with the modern resurgence of CHW programs spurred by the Alma-Ata Declaration.

Information sources CINAHL, PsycINFO, PubMed, and Web of Science will be searched to identify peer-reviewed journal articles that measure the prevalence of predetermined occupational mental health issues using validated tools. Results will be filtered to include English-language studies published in 1978 or later.

Main outcome(s) There is no main outcome.

Data management Search results will be imported into Papers by ReadCube prior to deduplication in Covidence. Covidence will also be used to manage screening, full-text review, risk of bias, and data extraction processes.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis The Joanna Briggs Institute Prevalence Critical Appraisal Tool will be used to evaluate risk of bias for all included studies, with the checklist results presented alongside prevalence information in the final review.

Strategy of data synthesis Results will be presented in narrative form and in tables organized by condition, measurement tool, context, and population. Key points from data extraction, including study type, prevalence, and statistically significant associations, will be presented alongside critical appraisal results.

Subgroup analysis Meta-analysis will be conducted if three or more studies among similar CHW populations from the same or similar contexts can be identified and the studies use similar, validated measures for the condition under exploration.

Sensitivity analysis Sensitivity analysis will be considered should meta-analyses be conducted.

Language restriction English only.

Country(ies) involved United States of America, South Africa.

Keywords Occupational stress; anxiety; depression; community health workforce.

Contributions of each author
Author 1 - Rachel Stalnaker Coley - Assembled the author team, led the development of the protocol strategy, and drafted the manuscript.
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Author 2 - Bonheur Parfaite Nfurayase - The author contributed to the design of the systematic review and provided substantive feedback on the manuscript.
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Author 4 - Renier Coetzee - The author provided co-supervision to the first author's PhD research, supported the development of the systematic review strategy and provided substantive edits to the manuscript.
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