

A -Four Year Experience with the Female Community Health Workers Training Programme in Pakistan: Achievements and Challenges

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Context: The health status of women in Pakistan is linked directly to the societal structure. Social restrictions on mobility, socio-cultural norms that undervalue women as individuals and as a group and limited or non-existent financial autonomy have all combined to make the health status of Pakistani women even worse than the unenviable one of their male counterparts.

Setting: The Female Community Health Workers Training Programme (FCHWTP) was initiated in the site of Ziauddin Medical University's community-based education programme. This is a conservative Pakhtun community with a population of 20,000, 48% of whom are females. The FCHWTP has a two-fold objective of providing trained human resources for the University's center-based and outreach health services and to address the gender-based limitations of women's access to health care. A supplemental benefit is that this training equips female members of the community with the necessary technical expertise that will help them find a sustainable source of livelihood and an initial step towards empowerment.

Objectives: To describe the experience with the Female Community Health Workers Training Program (FCHWTP) between 2000-2004 and to identify potential barriers to training and retention of these workers.

Design: Review of relevant data from the programme records, interviews with trainers and female community health workers (FCHW) and focus group discussions.

Main outcomes: Number of FCHW enrolled each year, number of FCHWs successfully completing training, trainees' perception of the programme, follow-up of trainees for their chosen career paths, community perceptions of FCHWs and of the training programme. Themes arising from interviews and focus group discussions.

Session: Women and Health