

1 A new tool to measure approaches to supervision from the perspective of community health  
2 workers: A prospective, longitudinal, validation study in seven countries.

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4 Frédérique Vallières<sup>1\*</sup>, Philip Hyland<sup>1,2</sup>, Eilish McAuliffe<sup>3</sup>, Ilias Mahmud<sup>4,5</sup>, Olivia Tulloch<sup>6</sup>,  
5 Polly Walker<sup>7</sup>, and Miriam Taegtmeier<sup>8</sup>

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7 <sup>1</sup>Centre for Global Health, Trinity College Dublin, 7-9 Leinster Street South, Dublin 2, Ireland

8 <sup>2</sup>School of Business, National College of Ireland, Mayor Street, IFSC, Dublin 1, Ireland. Philip

9 Hyland: [philip.hyland@ncirl.ie](mailto:philip.hyland@ncirl.ie)

10 <sup>3</sup>School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Systems, University College Dublin, Dublin 4,

11 Ireland. Eilish McAuliffe: [eilish.mcauliffe@ucd.ie](mailto:eilish.mcauliffe@ucd.ie)

12 <sup>4</sup>James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University, 68 ShahidTajuddin Ahmed

13 Sharani, Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh. Ilias Mahmud: [imahmudot@gmail.com](mailto:imahmudot@gmail.com)

14 <sup>5</sup>College of Public Health and Health Informatics, Qassim University, Bukayriah, Qassim, the

15 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

16 <sup>6</sup>Options Consultancy Service, St Magnus House, 3 Lower Thames Street, London EC3R 6HD,

17 United Kingdom. Olivia Tulloch: [o.tulloch@options.co.uk](mailto:o.tulloch@options.co.uk)

18 <sup>7</sup>Global Centre for Health, HIV and WASH, World Vision International, Victoria Charities

19 Centre, 11 Belgrave Road, London, SW1V 1RB, United Kingdom. Polly Walker:

20 [Polly.Walker@wvi.org](mailto:Polly.Walker@wvi.org)

21 <sup>8</sup>Department of International Public Health, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Pembroke

22 Place, Liverpool, L3 5QA, United Kingdom. Miriam Taegtmeier:

23 [Miriam.Taegtmeier@lstmed.ac.uk](mailto:Miriam.Taegtmeier@lstmed.ac.uk)

24

25 \*Corresponding author

26 E-mail: [fvallier@ted.ie](mailto:fvallier@ted.ie)

27

## Abstract

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### **Background**

The global scale-up of community health workers (CHWs) depends on supportive management and supervision of this expanding cadre. Existing tools fail to incorporate the perspective of the CHW (i.e. perceived supervision) in terms of supportive experiences with their supervisor. Aligned to the WHO's strategy on human resources for health, we developed and validated a simple tool to measure perceived supervision across seven low and middle-income countries.

### **Methods**

Phase 1 was carried out with 327 CHWs in Sierra Leone. Twelve questions, informed by the extant literature on health worker supervision, were reduced to six questions using confirmatory factor analysis. Phase 2 employed structural equation modelling with 741 CHWs in six countries (Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique), to assess the factorial validity, predictive validity, and internal reliability of the questions at three time-points, over 8-months.

### **Results**

We developed a robust, 6-item measure of perceived supervision (PSS), capturing regular contact, two-way communication, and joint problem-solving elements as being critical from the perspective of CHWs. When assessed across the six countries, over time, the PSS was also found to have good validity and internal reliability. PSS scores at baseline positively and significantly predicted a range of performance-related outcomes at follow-up.

### **Conclusion**

The PSS is the first validated tool that measures supervisory experience from the perspective of CHWs and is applicable across multiple, culturally-distinct global health contexts with a wide range of CHW typologies. Simple, quick to administer, and freely available in eleven languages, the PSS could assist practitioners in the management of community health programmes.

56 **Keywords**

57 Community Health Workers, Supervision, Perceived Supervision Scale, Motivational

58 Outcomes, Scale Validation

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## Background

61 The important role of lower-cadre health workers in achieving Universal Health  
62 Coverage (UHC) is widely recognised, with community health workers (CHWs)  
63 frequently cited as a cost-effective, critical resource for the efficient delivery of primary  
64 care in low- and middle-income contexts (LMICs) [1, 2]. Unfortunately, scaling up and  
65 sustaining CHWs programme, as envisioned at Alma-Ata, has been challenging, with  
66 wide variations in the availability, coordination, support and management of  
67 community health worker programmes [3]. Accordingly, the most recent *Global  
68 strategy on human resources for health: Workforce 2030* [4] published by the World  
69 Health Organization (WHO) reiterates the need to harness the potential of community-  
70 based health workers. Specifically, the strategy calls for a global effort to integrate  
71 CHWs into national health-care systems as a means to improve their working  
72 conditions, capacity, and motivation [4].

73 More recently, the WHO have also called for rigorous scientific research in the  
74 area of community health workers to pay more attention to cross-cutting factors, such  
75 as management and supervision, that enable community-based health worker  
76 performance [5]. Decades of research on CHW initiatives to date have suggested  
77 several cross-cutting factors that contribute to the success of CHW programmes [6].  
78 Among these, supportive supervision consistently emerges as a key factor in  
79 determining CHW performance, motivation, and retention [7].

80 In contrast to more ‘traditional’ methods of supervision which are frequently  
81 characterised by performance audits, inspections, use of checklists, and controlling and  
82 authoritarian attitudes [7-10], supportive supervision favours shared performance goals,  
83 mentoring, and two-way communication [11]. Whereas traditional approaches are  
84 frequently criticised for their failure to enhance health worker motivation [12-14],

85 supportive approaches to supervision have been shown to increase the impact of CHW  
86 programmes as well as the productivity, motivation and job satisfaction of CHWs [7,  
87 15-17]. Moreover, CHWs themselves express clear preferences for supportive  
88 approaches that are responsive to the realities of the challenges they face in programme  
89 implementation [14, 18].

90 In addition to supportive approaches to supervision, CHW programmes often  
91 advocate for regular supervision of CHWs. Research suggests however that regular  
92 interaction with one's supervisor is insufficient. When compared to colleagues who had  
93 recently been supervised *and* felt supported by their supervisor, health workers who  
94 had recently been supervised, but did *not* feel supported, were found to be less  
95 productive [15]. This suggests that not only are health worker's perceptions of the  
96 supervisory relationship significant, but that perceptions of the supportive nature of this  
97 relationship is likely a more important predictor of work-related outcomes than  
98 frequency alone. This view is consistent with well-established theories within the work  
99 psychology literature, which state that subjective, cognitive appraisals of supervision  
100 are critical factors in the prediction of a range of work performance-related factors (e.g.,  
101 motivation, commitment, job satisfaction) [19].

102 While existing tools measure the supervision of CHWs (i.e. the "CHW  
103 Assessment and Improvement Matrix" [20]) by assessing the frequency of supervision  
104 and training of supervisors, these measures crucially ignore CHW perceptions of the  
105 supervisory process and their impact on work-performance-related factors. Moreover,  
106 such tools are lengthy, time-intensive, and require substantial programmatic input and  
107 resources; all of which are at a premium within human resource for health programming  
108 in LMICs. The need exists to develop a feasible, valid, and reliable measure of

109 perceived supervision that both recognises the experience of supervision from the  
110 perspective of the individual health worker and that allows the CHW voice to be heard.

111 The current study aimed to develop and psychometrically validate a new, simple  
112 measure of perceived supervision (the *Perceived Supervision Scale* (PSS)) that could  
113 be used across multiple global health contexts. To maximise the utility of the PSS in  
114 LMICs we sought to construct an easily-translatable measure, comprised of a limited  
115 number of items that can be quickly and easily administered and scored; an approach  
116 that should increase the likelihood of cross-cultural validity and subsequent use.

117 The development and validation of the PSS included two research phases. Phase  
118 1, conducted in Sierra Leone, was exploratory and sought to determine the most  
119 appropriate indicators of perceived supervision from an initial pool of test items. In  
120 other words, we sought to determine which items, when included in a questionnaire,  
121 measured perceived supervision among CHWs. Phase 2, conducted across six LMICs  
122 and over a period of eight months, sought to provide a comprehensive assessment of  
123 the psychometric properties of the PSS. Specifically, this phase assessed the predictive  
124 validity, factorial validity, cross-cultural and temporal stability of the factor structure,  
125 and the internal reliability of the PSS over time and across multiple cultural contexts.  
126 In other words, we sought to determine whether the questionnaire, as developed in the  
127 Sierra Leonean context also measured perceived supervision among CHWs across six  
128 other contexts, and whether measures of perceived supervision using the PSS at  
129 baseline, predicted a number of related human resource for health outcomes 8-months  
130 later. Additionally, we assessed whether the total score on the PSS could be used by  
131 implementers in the management and monitoring of CHW programmes.

## 132 **Methods**

### 133 *Participants and Procedures*

134 Phase 1 was conducted in Bonthe District, Sierra Leone among a convenience  
135 sample of 327 CHWs, representing 98% of the CHWs active in the four chiefdoms of  
136 Jong, Imperi, Sogbeni, and Kpanda Kemoh. Data collection took place over three weeks  
137 in May 2012 as part of a longitudinal cohort study of CHWs participating in World  
138 Vision Ireland’s Access to Infant and Maternal Health (AIM-Health) programme.  
139 Phase 2 recruited a convenience sample of 741 CHWs from an additional six countries  
140 (Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya, Indonesia, Malawi and Mozambique) all of whom were  
141 assessed across three time periods (baseline [T0], 4 months [T1], and 8 months [T2]).  
142 CHWs were recruited in consultation with either national ministries of health  
143 (Bangladesh, Malawi, Mozambique, Kenya), regional (Ethiopia) or district-level health  
144 management teams (Indonesia), and based on the presence of a functioning CHW  
145 programme in these districts. Data collection took place between October 2014 and  
146 May 2015 as part of the REACHOUT research consortium  
147 ([www.reachoutconsortium.org](http://www.reachoutconsortium.org)). Demographic information for all participants is  
148 reported in Table 1.

149

150 **INSERT TABLE 1 HERE**

151

152 *Development of the Initial Tool*

153 The 12 items of the PSS were initially constructed to capture aspects of  
154 supervision described in the literature [21] [22]. Items are scored using a 5-point Likert  
155 scale anchored by “strongly disagree” (1) and “strongly agree” (5). Items were designed  
156 to capture key components of supervision, as identified from the literature, including  
157 perceptions of regular contact (My supervisor meets with me regularly) and strong two-  
158 way communication (My supervisor meets with me regularly to discuss problems and

159 solutions; My supervisor takes into consideration my views and ideas; and My  
160 supervisor is a good communicator). These items were first translated in Phase 1 into  
161 Krio, Sierra Leone's *lingua franca*. During Phase 2, the refined version of the PSS was  
162 further translated into seven additional languages (Bangla, Kiswahili, Kamba, Bahasa-  
163 Indonesia, Chichewa, Portuguese, and Amharic). Translated forms of the PSS are  
164 available for free download at [www.perceivedsupervisionscale.com](http://www.perceivedsupervisionscale.com). All versions were  
165 piloted, revised, back-translated, and compared to the original English version prior to  
166 being administered by trained enumerators. In the case of illiterate CHWs, the PSS was  
167 administered with the help of an enumerator. In the case of literate CHWs, the PSS was  
168 completed directly by the CHW. In both phases, enumerators were trained to administer  
169 the PSS in the local languages and English.

170 In Phase 2, work-performance related factors were also assessed over time.  
171 Adapted from Mbindyo et al. [23], the *Motivational Outcome Scale* is a 12 item, self-  
172 report measure of work-performance related constructs: community commitment (2  
173 items,  $\alpha = .64$ ), organizational commitment (2 items,  $\alpha = .44$ ), job satisfaction (4  
174 items,  $\alpha = .73$ ), and work conscientiousness (4 items,  $\alpha = .73$ ). Each item was  
175 assessed using a 5-point Likert Scale, anchored by "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly  
176 agree" (5). Among the current sample, the scale possessed satisfactory internal  
177 reliability.

### 178 ***Analysis***

179 During Phase 1, the initial pool of 12 PSS items were assessed using  
180 confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to develop a short, unidimensional measure of  
181 perceived supervision (see Supplementary Table 2). CFA is a statistical technique that  
182 tests whether items in a questionnaire effectively measure a theoretical construct, or  
183 *latent construct*, that is itself not directly observable (i.e. perceived supervision) [24].



184 As Phase I was more exploratory in nature, we did not expect all 12 items to measure  
185 perceived supervision in a consistent and robust manner. To determine which of these  
186 12 items should be retained as the best measures of perceived supervision, we set an *a*  
187 *priori* criterion for item retention whereby only items with factor loadings<sup>1</sup> >.55  
188 (equalling 30% of variance explained by the latent variable) were retained [25]. In  
189 addition to consulting factor loadings, we also consulted modification indices produced  
190 in Mplus (Version 7.4). Modification indices provided suggestions of additional items  
191 that could be removed to improve model fit (i.e. items with covarying residuals) [26].

192 Phase 2 also used CFA procedures to determine the factorial validity of the PSS.  
193 In addition, structural equation modelling (SEM) methods were used to assess whether  
194 perceived supervision scores, as measured by the PSS at baseline (Time 0), predicted  
195 the four criterion variables of the Motivational Outcomes Scale at endline (Time 2),  
196 controlling for sex and educational status. Here, SEM was chosen to assess the  
197 predictive validity of the PSS as it allows for all effects in the model to be estimated  
198 simultaneously. In other words, SEM methods were used to test whether the  
199 administration of the PSS scale at earlier stages of CHW programmes predicted a range  
200 of meaningful human resource for health-related outcomes throughout later stages of a  
201 CHW programme, whereby job satisfaction, organizational commitment, community  
202 commitment, and work conscientiousness were measured as known determinants of  
203 CHW programme success. The internal reliability of the PSS was assessed using  
204 composite reliability analysis [27], and descriptive statistics were calculated for each  
205 country and at each assessment period.

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<sup>1</sup> Depicted as  $\lambda_{pre}$  in Supplementary Table 2, factor loadings indicate what proportion of the variance in each item on the questionnaire can be explained by the underlying latent construct.

206 Analyses were conducted in Mplus 7.4 [28] using the mean and variance-  
207 adjusted weighted least squares (WLSMV) estimator. The WLSMV estimator provides  
208 accurate parameter estimates, standard errors, and test-statistics when ordinal indicators  
209 are used [29]. Missing data was managed using the default pairwise present analysis  
210 method. Standard recommendations for assessing the fit of the CFA and SEM models  
211 were followed [30] whereby a non-significant chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) result indicates good  
212 model fit; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) values  $> .90$   
213 indicate good fit; Root-Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) with 90%  
214 confidence interval (RMSEA 90% CI) values  $< .08$  reflect good fit; and values  $< 1.0$   
215 for the Weighted Root Mean Square Residual (WRMR) indicate good model fit. In  
216 other words, models that met these criteria were seen to be a ‘good’ representation of  
217 perceived supervision.

218

## Results

### 219 Phase 1: Development of the Perceived Supervision Scale

220 The fit of the unidimensional, 12-item model to the sample data was poor ( $\chi^2 =$   
221 355.417,  $df = 54$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = .757; TLI = .703; RMSEA [90% CI] = .131 [.119-  
222 .145]; WRMR = 1.739). Inspection of the model parameters indicated that six items  
223 failed to reach the *a priori* criterion of factor loadings  $> .55$  on the Perceived  
224 Supervision factor (Supplementary Table 2). The unidimensional model was  
225 subsequently re-estimated based on the remaining six items and model fit was  
226 acceptable ( $\chi^2 = 43.952$ ,  $df = 9$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = .961; TLI = .934; RMSEA [90% CI] =  
227 .110 [.079-.143]; WRMR = .910). The factor loadings for the six items were all positive,  
228 statistically significant, and of a robust magnitude.

### 229 Phase 2: Validity of the Perceived Supervision Scale

230 Table 2 reports the CFA results for the six-item, unidimensional model of the  
231 PSS across six nations, and at three assessment periods. In most cases the  $\chi^2$  values  
232 were statistically significant and the RMSEA values were above the suggested cut-off  
233 point of .08. However, rejection of the models based on these indices is not warranted  
234 given the tendency for the  $\chi^2$  to generate Type 1 errors, and the RMSEA to generate  
235 Type 2 errors in models with few degrees of freedom [31]. Contrastingly, the CFI, TLI,  
236 and WRMR results provided consistent support for the factorial validity of the PSS. In  
237 all 17 assessments, the CFI, TLI, and WRMR results satisfied the criteria for excellent  
238 model fit. Overall, the CFA results provide support for the validity of a unidimensional  
239 structure of the PSS that is stable over time, and cross-culturally consistent.

240 **INSERT TABLE 2 HERE**

241 The standardised factor loadings for the PSS across each nation, at each assessment,  
242 are reported in Supplementary Table 3. Factor loadings at T0 were all positive,  
243 significant ( $p < .001$ ), and robust, with mean factor loadings ranging from .68  
244 (Indonesia) to .92 (Kenya). Similarly, at T1 all factor loadings were positive, significant  
245 ( $p < .001$ ), and robust, with mean factor loadings ranging from .74 (Indonesia) to .83  
246 (Ethiopia). At T2, there was greater variability in the performance of the model  
247 parameters. Within the Indonesian sample it was necessary to add a residual covariance  
248 between two items with the lowest factor loadings (PSS4 and PSS6: factor loadings  $<$   
249 .50) to achieve acceptable model fit. Additionally, within the Ethiopian sample two  
250 items possessed weak factor loadings (PSS2 = .11 and PSS4 = .22). Nonetheless, mean  
251 factor loadings were generally robust, ranging from .50 (Ethiopia) to .91 (Bangladesh).

252 Given the stability of the unidimensional structure of the PSS across nations,  
253 and time, all PSS data at T0 was merged. Model fit of this consolidated data was  
254 satisfactory ( $N = 710$ ;  $\chi^2 = 138.936$ ,  $df = 9$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = .987; TLI = .979; RMSEA

255 [90% CI] = .143 [.122-.164]; WRMR = .864), and therefore used to assess predictive  
256 validity<sup>2</sup>.

### 257 *Predictive Validity of the Perceived Supervision Scale*

258 A PSS latent variable modelled at T0 was used to predict the summed scores of  
259 four criterion variables (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, community  
260 commitment, and work conscientiousness) measured eight months later (T2),  
261 controlling for sex and educational status. The fit of the model to the data was excellent  
262 ( $\chi^2 = 91.276$ ,  $df = 41$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = .991; TLI = .986; RMSEA [90% CI] = .045 [.033-  
263 .058]; WRMR = .847). As detailed in Table 3, the model explained between 5.8% and  
264 16.4% of variance in each of the criterion variables, and perceived supervision  
265 positively predicted all variables ( $\beta$  values ranged from .16 to .30).

266

267 **INSERT TABLE 3 HERE**

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### 270 *Internal reliability and descriptive statistics for the PSS*

271 Composite reliability analyses indicated that the PSS possesses satisfactory  
272 internal reliability (Supplementary Table 3), indicating that the six items were internally  
273 consistent and serve as accurate measures of perceived supervision. In every national  
274 context, and at each assessment period, the reliabilities ranged from .68 to .97.  
275 Descriptive statistics for the PSS across all nations, at each assessment period, are  
276 presented in Table 4.

277 **INSERT TABLE 4 HERE**

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<sup>2</sup> A unidimensional model indicates that the PSS should be scored by summing questions PSS1-PSS6 to produce a total PSS score.

279

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## Discussion

281       The Perceived Supervision Scale is the first validated tool developed for  
282 collecting CHW perceptions of their supervision. The tool is brief, robust and can be  
283 applied across multiple, culturally-distinct global health contexts with a wide range of  
284 CHW typologies. Despite its recognised importance of supervision in CHW  
285 programming, supervision is often one of the weakest and most difficult elements of  
286 CHW programming to implement consistently [9, 32]. The factor structure of the PSS  
287 allows researchers and implementers to calculate a sum score of perceived supervision  
288 within CHW programming. Specifically, the total PSS score allows for a greater  
289 understanding the nature of a positive supervisory relationship. Furthermore, it grants  
290 the ability to managers to detect problematic supervisory interactions, prompt the  
291 introduction of stronger training programmes, and where necessary, the reorganisation  
292 of supervisory arrangements, contributing to the sustainability of CHW programmes.  
293 The ability for CHW programme managers to monitor the interpersonal supervisory  
294 relationships of CHWs could help prevent deleterious work performance outcomes  
295 associated with high staff turnover and loss of worker motivation [7, 33]. The  
296 development of the PSS therefore represents a valuable contribution to global efforts to  
297 address human resource for health shortages and towards achieving UHC. Furthermore,  
298 the development of the PSS contributes towards addressing more recent calls for  
299 rigorous approaches towards scale development for human resource for health  
300 programming [34].

301       Phase 1 served to derive the most appropriate indicators of perceived  
302 supervision. From an initial pool of 12 item statements, developed from the extant  
303 literature on CHW supervision, six items were retained. Consistent with previous

304 literature, the items retained as part of the final PSS, reflect the importance of *both*  
305 supportive and regular aspects of supervision. Interestingly, those items associated with  
306 more traditional forms of supervision (i.e. controlling or negative interactions), were  
307 least reflective of the nature of perceived supervision among this sample of CHWs.  
308 This suggests that CHWs in Sierra Leone perceived the supervision process as a  
309 generally positive, supportive, and regular experience. The items retained as part of the  
310 supportive supervision factor offer additional insight into what content or skills should  
311 be emphasised or included as part of supervision training programmes. More  
312 specifically, the items retained in the PSS are consistent with evidence that a supportive  
313 supervisor should: meet regularly with CHWs, offer opportunities for knowledge  
314 sharing and refresher training [33], recognise and appreciate the work and efforts of a  
315 CHW, take into account the views and ideas of CHWs, and communicate effectively  
316 with the CHW [11].

317         As it was possible that the observed findings from Phase 1 reflected the  
318 idiosyncratic responses of the Sierra Leonean CHWs, it was imperative to assess the  
319 replicability of these findings in alternate contexts. Phase 2 confirmed the PSS's  
320 unidimensional structure across multiple samples of CHWs from different contexts,  
321 cadres, cultures, and demographics. Additionally, the factorial validity of the PSS was  
322 evidenced across time, with the scale exhibiting stable psychometric properties  
323 (reliability and validity) over a period of eight months. Furthermore, the PSS positively  
324 predicted a range of work-performance related indicators eight months later including  
325 job satisfaction, work conscientiousness, community commitment, and organizational  
326 commitment, while controlling for sex and education. These results indicate that CHWs  
327 who perceive greater levels of supervision (i.e. supportive) report greater job  
328 satisfaction, work conscientiousness and higher levels of both community and

329 organizational commitment over time. Administering the PSS during early stages of  
330 programme implementation, or when used regularly as a monitoring tool, may therefore  
331 help managers to adapt supervision approaches before they negatively impact on other  
332 organizational factors in the long-term. Although such findings are important, future  
333 research should extend upon these findings and assess the effectiveness of the PSS to  
334 also predict objective outcomes of CHW performance and community health outcomes.

335 The current study has several limitations that should be recognised. The  
336 selection of the six PSS items was drawn from a sample of CHWs in Sierra Leone, and  
337 although the latent structure of these items was confirmed cross-culturally, it is possible  
338 that had the scale refinement process been conducted in a different setting, a different  
339 set of indicators may have been retained. It is important to note that the PSS is not  
340 presented as a comprehensive measure of perceived supervision, but rather a brief  
341 measure of the construct that possesses high utility across global health contexts.  
342 Second, the country-specific CFA models generated during Phase 2 of the study were  
343 carried out using relatively small sample sizes. Although not ideal for latent variable  
344 modelling, the small number of indicators in the PSS render this a minor limitation [35].  
345 Third, it is worth noting that a residual covariance was added between two items in one  
346 (Indonesia, time 2) of seventeen assessments of model fit. Finally, while the PSS has  
347 been validated among CHWs across a range of LMIC contexts, it is necessary to  
348 determine the reliability and validity of PSS among more highly skilled cadres of health  
349 workers globally.

## 350 **Conclusion**

351 In comparison to current tools [20] that focus on capturing the frequency and  
352 regularity of supervision, the PSS allows for the subjective measurement for  
353 supervision as a predictor of future CHW satisfaction, engagement, and commitment.

354 Simple and quick to administer, and currently available in nine languages, the validated  
355 PSS has the potential to contribute towards a more accurate understanding of CHW's  
356 perspectives of supervision, as a critical determinant of successful CHW programmes  
357 across a wide range of contexts.  
358



359 **Declarations**

360 **Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate**

361 Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethical Review Committee, Trinity College  
362 Dublin and Connaught Hospital Freetown (Phase 1), in addition to the Liverpool School  
363 of Tropical Medicine Research Ethics Committee and six local ethics committees  
364 (Phase 2) (Supplementary Table 1).

365 **Consent for Publication**

366 Not Applicable

367 **Availability of Data and Material**

368 The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the  
369 corresponding author on reasonable request.

370 **Competing Interests**

371 The authors declare that they have no competing interests

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378

379 **Author Contributions**

380 FV conducted the literature review, designed the study and, together with EM, designed  
381 the items and coordinated Phase 1 data collection and analysis. PH and FV led the  
382 overall data analysis. FV, PH, PW and MT contributed equally to the manuscript  
383 writing. MT, OT, and IM coordinated the data collection and extracted the data for

384 Phase 2. All authors contributed to the critical interpretation of the results and approved  
385 the final version. FV is the final guarantor of the manuscript.

386

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405

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