

Abstract: How to deal with the suffering: Utility of an emotional containment strategy to collect data for verbal autopsies in Mexico

Sandra Trevino-Siller, Dolores Ramirez-Villalobos, Mario Salvador Sanchez-Dominguez, Bernardo Hernandez Prado

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Abstract

Verbal autopsies are often used to establish cause of death but can be emotionally taxing on the interviewers. We conducted focus groups with interviewers ($N=15$) who collected data for verbal autopsies in Mexico in order to explore the utility of an emotional containment strategy designed to boost self-confidence and resilience. The interviewers reflected on broader cultural perspectives on illness and death and described the strategy as helpful in developing strategies to manage emotionally stressful situations and develop their confidence in their work performance. This type of intervention may be useful for field personnel who perform verbal autopsy interviews.

Key Messages

- In low- and middle-income countries with less reliable statistics systems, a significant proportion of deaths is not certified by a professional doctor. This complicates the registration of causes of death, which is a crucial issue for health systems. In the absence of reliable vital statistics systems, verbal autopsies (VA) offer an alternative for establishing cause of death.
- In response to emotional crises leading to resignations among the interviewers while testing an instrument for collecting VA, we designed an emotional containment strategy (ECS). It was specifically crafted to boost the self-confidence and resilience of participants in addition to enhancing their capacity for emotional recovery and to regain a functional state. In order to explore ECS results we conducted a qualitative cross-sectional study with four focus groups of interviewers who collected VA.
- The results obtained were positive, the interviewers were able to perform their work better by overcoming the emotional crisis that occurred both in them and in the people they interviewed.
- We recommend developing this type of intervention with all field staff performing verbal autopsy interviews, not only as a resource for emotional health, but also as a means of achieving better-quality data collection.