

Resilience among Community Health Workers (CHWs): A World Vision-led Study in Lao PDR and Zambia

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Photos: CHWs in Laos and Zambia

Background

Resilience is defined as the capacity of a system to adapt successfully to challenges that threaten its function, survival, or future development (Masten, 2021). A resilient individual has the capacity to interact with the environment in a way that will optimize their assets and external resources, helping them to navigate through challenges (Fergus, 2005; Ungar, 2013). For Community Health Workers (CHWs), their resilience will determine how they manage navigating heavy workloads, community engagement, and limited resources. CHWs play a critical role in ensuring Universal Health Coverage and health equity is achieved, especially for vulnerable populations. The nature of the CHW's work require them to take stressful roles, such as advocating for the rights of the underserved. While CHWs are frequently exposed to challenges, programme implementers and policy makers seldom pay attention to the resilience of CHWs.

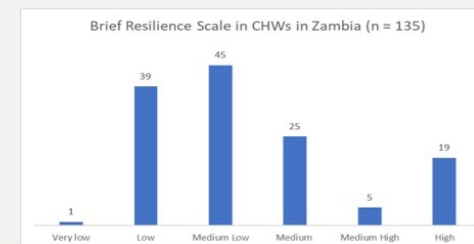
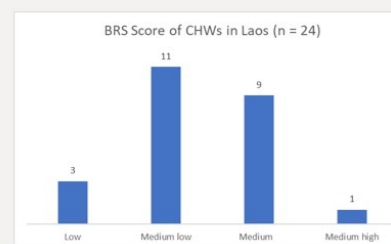
Methodology

- From July-September 2024, World Vision conducted a study on Community Health Worker (CHW) resilience in Lao PDR and Zambia as part of a **Growth Monitoring and Promotion (GMP) CHW training package**.
- 135 CHWs from Zambia and 24 CHWs from Lao PDR were surveyed using the translated Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) developed by Smith et al. (2023), as a self-administered tool.
- BRS has six statements with a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree), designed to measure resilience as the ability to bounce back from stress.

Respond to each statement below by circling one answer per row.		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
BRS 1	I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.	1	2	3	4	5
BRS 2	I have a hard time making it through stressful events.	5	4	3	2	1
BRS 3	It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.	1	2	3	4	5
BRS 4	It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.	5	4	3	2	1
BRS 5	I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.	1	2	3	4	5
BRS 6	I tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in my life.	5	4	3	2	1

Resilience Level.	Mean Range	Sum Range	Percentile Range (%)
Very high	4.67–5.00	28.00–30.00	97–100
High	4.00–4.66	24.00–27.99	84–96
Medium high	3.67–3.99	22.00–23.99	69–83
Medium	3.17–3.66	19.00–21.99	32–68
Medium low	2.67–3.16	16.00–18.99	17–31
Low	1.83–2.66	11.00–15.99	4–16
Very low	1.00–1.82	6.00–10.99	0–3

Source: Smith BW, deCruz-Dixon N, Schodt K, Torres F. Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). In: Medvedev ON, Krägeloh CU, Siegert RJ, Singh NN, editors. Handbook of Assessment in Mindfulness Research [Internet]. Cham: Springer International Publishing; 2023 [cited 2025 Jun 16]; p. 1–19. Available from: https://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-030-77644-2_92-1 DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77644-2_92-1



Results

Overall results indicated that **most CHWs in both Zambia and Laos scored in the low to medium-low resilience range**. In Laos, the mean BRS score is 2.99 (± 0.37), while in Zambia, the mean BRS score is 3.09 (± 0.62). In Zambia, BRS scores were analysed further using ANOVA, revealing that BRS score does not differ significantly by CHWs' age, gender, or education level.

Conclusions

- Measuring & analysing the resilience of CHWs can be done quickly and relatively easily.
- The findings highlight the urgent need for CHW capacity-building strategies that integrate resilience measurement and strengthening, along with improvements in working conditions, supportive supervision, and adequate equipment.
- Embedding resilience within CHW training and support systems may provide a stronger foundation for sustainable primary health care delivery.