Measuring inequalities in the distribution of the Fiji Health Workforce

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Introduction

- The planning, production and management of human resources for health remains underdeveloped in many low- and middle-income countries despite the centrality of health workers to the population’s health.
- This is especially true for countries like Fiji, which face a major challenge in distributing its health workforce across more than 100 inhabited islands.
- In Fiji, the estimated health worker density ratio is only 0.4 practicing physicians and 2.2 nurses and midwives per 1000 people, far below WHO’s recommended threshold of 2.3 per 1000 (WHO, 2006).
- Addressing the maldistribution of health workers must be informed by the level of ‘need’.

Aim

To measure inequalities in the distribution of the existing stock of health workers across divisions and provinces in Fiji.

Table 2: Measures of inequality in health worker distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures across divisions</th>
<th>Measures across provinces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p90/p10</td>
<td>Gini coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All health workers</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Measures of inequality in health worker distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures across divisions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p90/p10</td>
<td>Gini coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses</td>
<td>0.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

- In 2011, Health worker densities in 9 of the 15 provinces were below the recommended minimum ratio for nurses, and all were below the minimum ratio for doctors.
- Of the four divisions, one was below the recommended minimum ratio for nurses, and all were below for doctors.
- Overall inequality in the distribution of the health workforce was much higher at the lower level (provinces) compared to higher level (divisions) (Table 2).
- Overall inequality in the distribution of the health workforce between provinces was much higher compared to overall inequality between divisions for all categories of health workers (Table 3).
- At the provincial level, the share of health workers increased almost in proportion with need (Fig 1).
- At the provincial level too, the share of health workers increased almost in proportion with need but there are some slight inequalities (Fig 2).

Discussion

- There is a significant shortage of health workers at the provincial level in Fiji.
- With respect to the distribution of health workers, the decile dispersion ratio, Gini coefficient, and Theil – L index together form a consistent picture that while inequalities exist at the provincial level in Fiji, mainly with respect to the distribution of doctors, these inequalities are relatively small.
- Using a measure of need defined in terms of mortality, we find that health workers tend to be located in areas where need is greatest.
- This suggests that the Fijian government is responding to health care needs as best it can, using the available stock of health workers.
- Efforts must focus on decreasing national shortages, most notably of doctors and specialists at the provincial level.