

# Evaluating District Hospital Systems in South Africa

*A Quasi-Experimental Analysis of Clinical Outcomes*

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** District hospitals are a critical component of the healthcare system, yet robust evidence on the effectiveness of different systemic models in improving clinical outcomes is limited. This gap hinders evidence-based policy and resource allocation.

**Purpose and objectives:** This study aimed to evaluate the comparative effectiveness of two distinct district hospital system models—centralised specialist-led versus decentralised generalist-led—on a composite measure of avoidable adverse clinical outcomes in South Africa.

**Keywords:** *district hospitals, South Africa, quasi-experimental design, clinical outcomes, health systems evaluation, sub-Saharan Africa*

### Article Highlights

- Decentralised system model reduced adverse outcomes by 3.2 percentage points
- Strongest effects observed in sepsis management and perinatal care
- Organisational structure and skill-mix distribution are key quality determinants
- Findings support policy shifts toward decentralised clinical decision-making

### Core Statistical Model

Difference-in-differences analysis estimated the effect of system type on adverse outcome rates, controlling for patient case-mix and hospital-level covariates using cluster-robust standard errors.

*This analysis provides robust quasi-experimental evidence for health system design in resource-constrained settings.*

## ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

This is an abstract-only publication. The complete research paper with full methodology, results, discussion, and references is available upon request.

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