



Community Cadres and Clinical Care: An Ethnographic Study of Local Agency in Maternal Health Initiatives in Chad

Aïcha NDjamena^{1,2}, Mahamat Saleh^{1,2}

¹ King Faisal University of Chad

² University of N'Djamena

Published: 23 June 2022 | **Received:** 18 April 2022 | **Accepted:** 03 June 2022

Correspondence: andjamena@aol.com

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.18540180](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18540180)

Author notes

Aïcha NDjamena is affiliated with King Faisal University of Chad and focuses on Medicine research in Africa.

Mahamat Saleh is affiliated with University of N'Djamena and focuses on Medicine research in Africa.

Abstract

Maternal health initiatives in West Africa frequently depend on externally designed programmes. In Chad, where maternal mortality remains persistently high, the use of local community cadres—villagers trained as volunteers—is a common intervention. The lived experience and agency of these cadres within the formal healthcare system are not well documented. This ethnographic study explored the role and agency of local community cadres within maternal health initiatives in Chad. It aimed to understand how cadres navigate between community norms and clinical protocols, and how this intermediary position shapes programme delivery. A longitudinal ethnographic approach was employed, involving 18 months of fieldwork in two Chadian districts. Data collection included participant observation with 24 community cadres and clinical staff, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions with community members. Cadres exercised significant, yet often unacknowledged, agency by adapting clinical messages to local cultural contexts. A central finding was their role as cultural translators, beyond mere linguistic interpretation. For instance, a majority of observed cadres creatively reframed the concept of ‘birth planning’ to align with local kinship decision-making structures, which improved its uptake. Community cadres are not passive implementers but active agents who mediate between biomedical systems and local realities. Their agency is crucial for the cultural legitimisation and practical effectiveness of maternal health programmes. Programme designers should formally recognise and support the adaptive work of cadres through more flexible training. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should move beyond simple output metrics to capture the nuanced brokerage role cadres perform. maternal health, community health workers, ethnography, Chad, agency, cultural brokerage, programme implementation This study provides an in-depth, emic perspective on the critical intermediary role of community cadres, highlighting their agency as cultural translators essential for contextualising maternal healthcare.

Keywords: *Medical anthropology, Community health workers, Maternal health, Sub-Saharan Africa, Ethnography, Global health initiatives, Local agency*

ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

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

REQUEST FULL PAPER

 **Email:** info@parj.africa

Request your copy of the full paper today!

SUBMIT YOUR RESEARCH

Are you a researcher in Africa? We welcome your submissions!

Join our community of African scholars and share your groundbreaking work.

 **Submit at:** app.parj.africa



Scan to visit app.parj.africa

Open Access Scholarship from PARJ

Empowering African Research | Advancing Global Knowledge