Incorporating elements of social franchising in government health services improves the quality of infant and young child feeding counseling services at commune health centers in Vietnam

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Background and Objectives
Evidence indicates that social franchising improves the quality of health services in developing countries, but this approach has not been tested for nutrition services.

Under the Alive & Thrive (A&T) initiative, elements of social franchising, particularly standardized and branded services for infant and young child feeding (IYCF) counseling, were introduced in 15 government-owned health centers as the first steps toward establishing a social-franchise service.

This study assessed the role of the A&T interventions in shaping the quality of the counseling facilities and services.

Methods
Data from a process evaluation were used. A&T-supported facilities (A&T-F, n=20) were compared to standard facilities (SF, n=12).

Program impact pathways (PIPs) were mapped to describe a detailed pathway from the various program inputs to the intended program impacts on IYCF practices and nutrition.

Data collection included: facility assessments (n=32), provider surveys (n=96), counseling observations (n=137), client interviews (n=137), in-depth interviews with mothers (n=48).

Donabedian’s conceptual framework was applied to assess 3 components of service quality: structure, process, and outcomes.

Results

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for assessing quality of care

Figure 2. Interpersonal communication skills of providers in A&T-supported facilities and standard facilities

Given the early stage of implementation, utilization was low overall, dropping from a satisfactory 48.9% among mothers with infants 0-6 months to 22.7% among those with infants 6 months and older.

Figure 3: Percentage of target populations in the commune that utilized services by duration of A&T-supported facility operation

Table 1: Structural attributes of A&T-supported facilities and standard facilities

Table 2: Process attributes of A&T-supported facilities and standard facilities

Table 3: Technical content of counseling sessions in A&T-supported facilities and standard facilities

Table 4: Client satisfaction when receiving counseling from A&T-supported facilities and standard facilities

Conclusions:
Incorporating elements of social franchising significantly enhances the quality of nutrition counseling services within government primary health facilities. This model has the potential to improve IYCF practices provided utilization of services increases substantially.

Keywords:
Social franchise, counseling, infant and young child feeding practices, quality of care, Vietnam