

**Decentralization of the Health Care Services
in the Southern Region - Jamaica:
The Health Workers' Perspective.**

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ABSTRACT

A study of the Decentralization of the Health Care Services in Southern Region – Jamaica: The Health Workers' perspective

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Decentralization is an element of the Health Sector Reform which is considered desirable for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the health system. The implementation of decentralization was considered to be one of the most critical components of the Health Reform Programme that was embarked upon in Jamaica by the Ministry of Health. The Health Reform Unit was established in 1995 to manage its implementation. The Southern Regional Health Authority, one of the four regions was established in 1998.

The study seeks to determine staff knowledge of the objectives of decentralization, the successes and failures of the system in terms of the proposed outcomes and to find out the extent to which they are satisfied with the delivery of health care service within a decentralized system.

The study is a cross sectional survey. The study population comprised of all health workers within the Southern Regional Health Authority that is, the Parishes of St. Elizabeth, Manchester and Clarendon. The study incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods in the form of structured questionnaire and focus groups discussions.

The integration of primary and secondary levels of care, the workers thought to have been the greatest improvement, while the provisions of quality health care and improved communication are among the main objectives of decentralization seen by the workers as being achieved. The overall responses varied among the categories of workers as far as the level of improvements made and their satisfaction with decentralization of the services.

This study challenges the argument that there has been an improvement in the delivery of health services in the Southern Region under decentralization. Indeed some workers particularly the lower categories of staff expressed areas of improvement. Inadequate improvements expressed by workers are, limited finances and low salary, poor human resource management, poor communication and very little consultation. A return to centralization is considered a preference by a majority of workers.

On the other hand, the greatest optimism is that decentralization will in the future improve health care services and that the participation of workers in decision-making process will improve.