

Vocational and business training benefit women on the labour market, but the effects of most programmes are small



Vocational training has small positive effects on employment, formal employment, earnings, and income

What is the aim of this review?

This Campbell systematic review examines the impact of vocational and business training targeted at women in low- and middle-income countries. The review summarises evidence from thirty-five quantitative studies with an experimental or quasi-experimental design. The review summarises the impact of 30 interventions, containing data from over 80,000 women. The qualitative narrative meta-synthesis includes findings from 50 studies.

Vocational training has small positive effects on employment, formal employment, and earnings. Business training combined with other programme components has positive effects on self-employment, and sales or profits. These relatively small effects may be insufficient to justify scaling up vocational or business training programmes. Design variations to increase impact need to be tested.

What did the review study?

Women around the world often perform jobs with minimal skill requirements, and encounter few opportunities for learning and advancement. Governments and development agencies try to improve women's skills through vocational and business training programmes.

This review summarises evidence on the impacts of such programmes, and on the barriers to and facilitators of vocational and business training effectiveness.

What studies are included?

Included studies are experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations which measured the impact of vocational and business training programmes targeting women 18 years or older, in low- and middle-income countries. The review also includes qualitative and mixed-methods studies that explore barriers to, and facilitators of, vocational and business training effectiveness.

What are the main results in this review?

Vocational training has small positive effects: employment and formal employment increased by 11 percent and 8 percent, respectively, and income by 6 percent. There is some variability in the findings.

Effects are larger in programmes with a gender focus. Effects on earnings, but not employment, are larger in programmes that include life skills training or an internship. Employment effects are



How up-to-date is this review?

The review authors searched for studies published up to September 2016. This Campbell Systematic Review was published in December 2017.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary was prepared by Howard White (Campbell Collaboration) based on the Campbell Systematic Review 2017:16 Vocational and business training to improve women's labour market outcomes in low- and middle-income countries: a systematic review by Marjorie Chinen, Thomas de Hoop, Josh Sennett, Lorena Aleazer, Maria Balarin (DOI 10.4073/ csr.2017:16). The summary was redesigned and edited by Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration). Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.



larger in Africa and Asia. Effects are stronger six months after the start of the programme than twelve months after the start of the programme.

Vocational training programmes were commonly outsourced without establishing adequate quality control procedures or monitoring mechanisms that may undermine effectiveness.

Business training combined with cash transfers or life skills training increases the likelihood of self-employment by 73 percent, and sales or profits by 7 percent. Business training with cash transfers did not have different effects from business training without cash transfers.

Effects on sales are larger in sub-Saharan Africa (15 percent). This larger effect may be caused by the stronger gender focus of those programmes. The positive effects on sales and profits appear driven by the inclusion of mentoring and technical assistance components that enhance business knowledge and practices.

Structural barriers, such as distance and cost of transportation, time constraints for participation, and economic and labour market barriers, limit programme effectiveness. Gender norms such as occupational segregation and the unequal division of domestic and care responsibilities, as well as the cost and availability of childcare facilities also discourage women's participation in vocational and business training.

What do the findings in this review mean?

Vocational training had small positive effects on employment, formal employment, and earnings. Business training combined with other programme components had positive effects on self-employment, as well as small positive effects on sales or profits. Yet these relatively small effects may be insufficient to justify scaling up vocational or business training programmes.

Effects of vocational training programmes may be increased by the inclusion of a stronger gender focus, life skills training, or an internship. However, the current evidence is not sufficient to make strong claims of the effectiveness of such an approach. These mechanisms should be tested further with rigorous mixed-methods studies with multiple treatment arms.