A cross-sectional study was conducted to assess the performance of village health workers (VHWs) in the Child Malnutrition Control Program and determine the factors affecting their performance. The data were collected by using structured questionnaire to interview 252 village health workers, who had been working for the Child Malnutrition Control Program in Thai Binh province, Vietnam. The study was undertaken in 27 randomly selected communes of three districts namely Dong Hung, Quynh Phu and Vu Thu during March 2001.

The result of the study showed that the prevalence of good performance among VHWs in the Child Malnutrition Control Program was about 56 percent. It was found that 65.0 percent of VHWs had good performance in nutrition education and rehabilitation, while 75.0 percent had a good performance in growth monitoring and promotion. Socio-demographic characteristics such as age and marital status had an association with VHWs’ performance ($\chi^2 = 5.046$ and 7.831, p-value = 0.025 and 0.020, respectively). There were significant relationships between number of training course undertaken ($r = 0.289$ and p-value = 0.000), time of the last training ($\chi^2 = 13.098$, p-value = 0.000), duration of training ($\chi^2 = 9.634$, p-value = 0.008) and level of performance. A strong positive correlation between knowledge on nutrition, attitudes toward performing nutrition activities, and performance of VHWs was also revealed in this study ($r = 0.434$ and 0.481, p < 0.001, respectively). Support from local leaders was found to be associated with performance of the village health workers ($\chi^2 = 12.764$, p-value = 0.012). The study results also suggested an association between support from family and health staff and performance although it was not proved by statistical test.

These findings suggest that the performance of VHWs needs to be improved though regular continuing education, more frequent supervision, and provision of diversified IEC materials. Also, to improve the VHWs’ performance in the Child Malnutrition Control Program, local leaders should facilitate working condition, help to solve the problem or discuss plan monthly with the village health workers.

In order to have an overall picture of both the quality and effectiveness of VHWs’ work, a similar research with a larger sample size and applying techniques such as real observation, in depth interviews, and group discussions is recommended.